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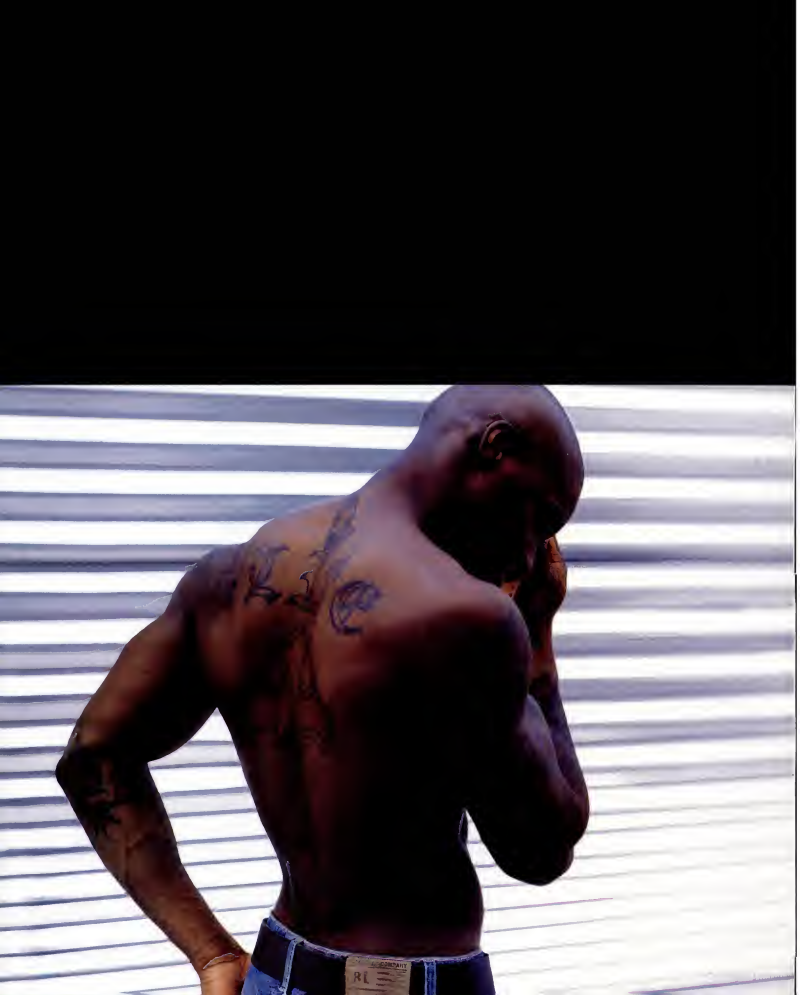
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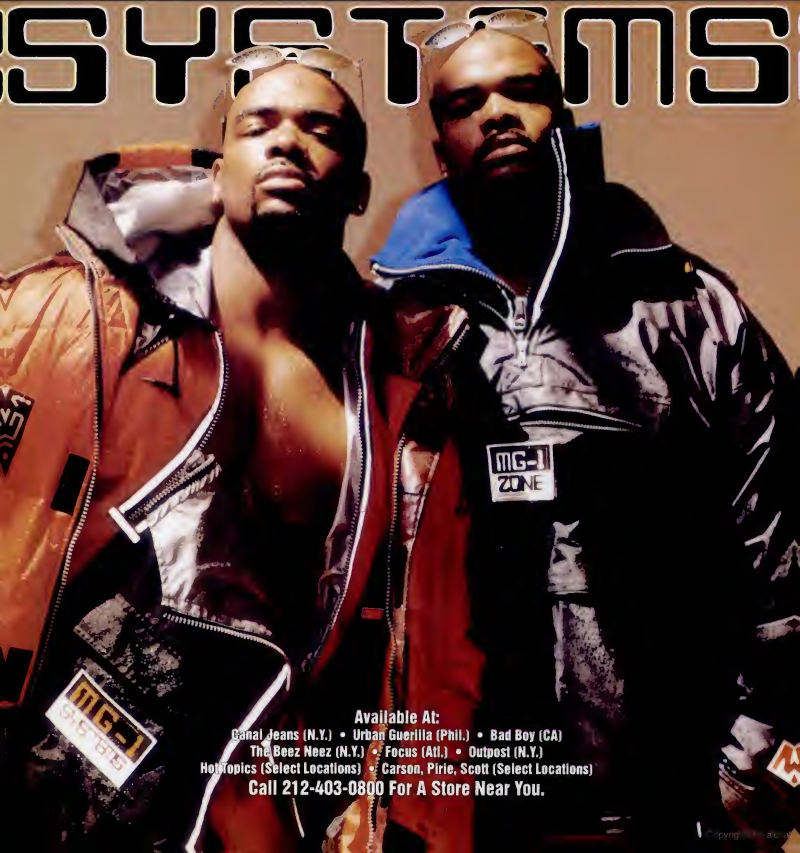
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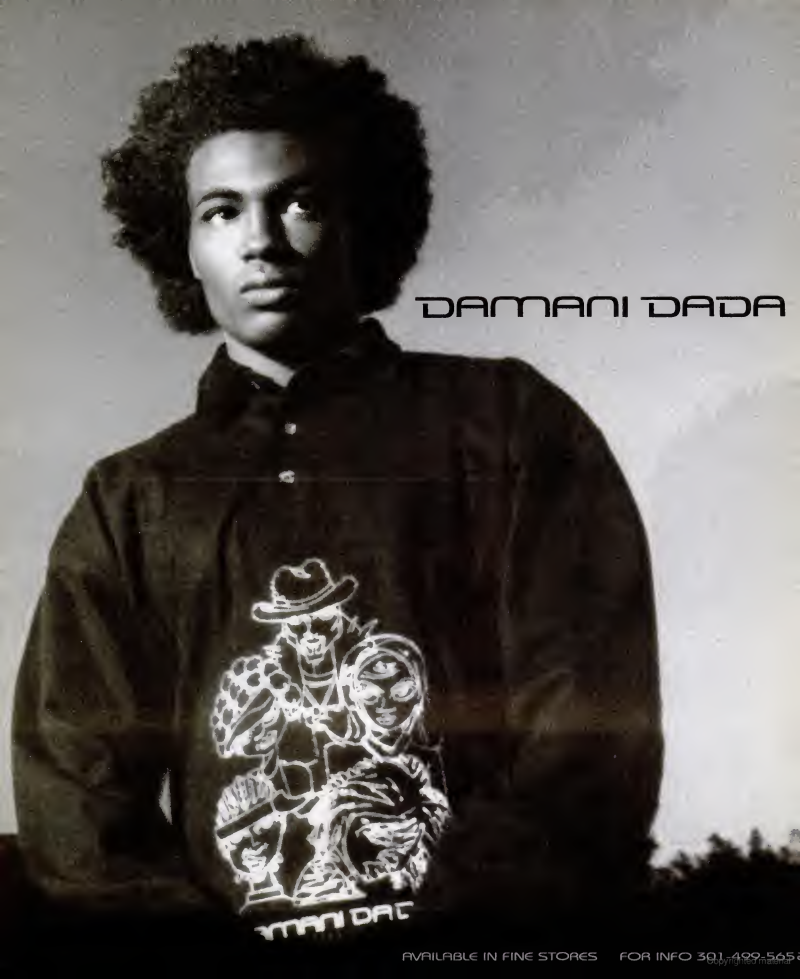
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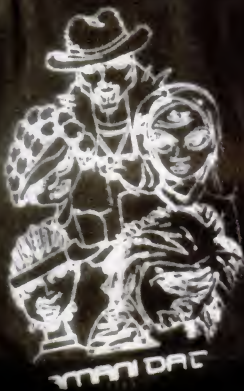
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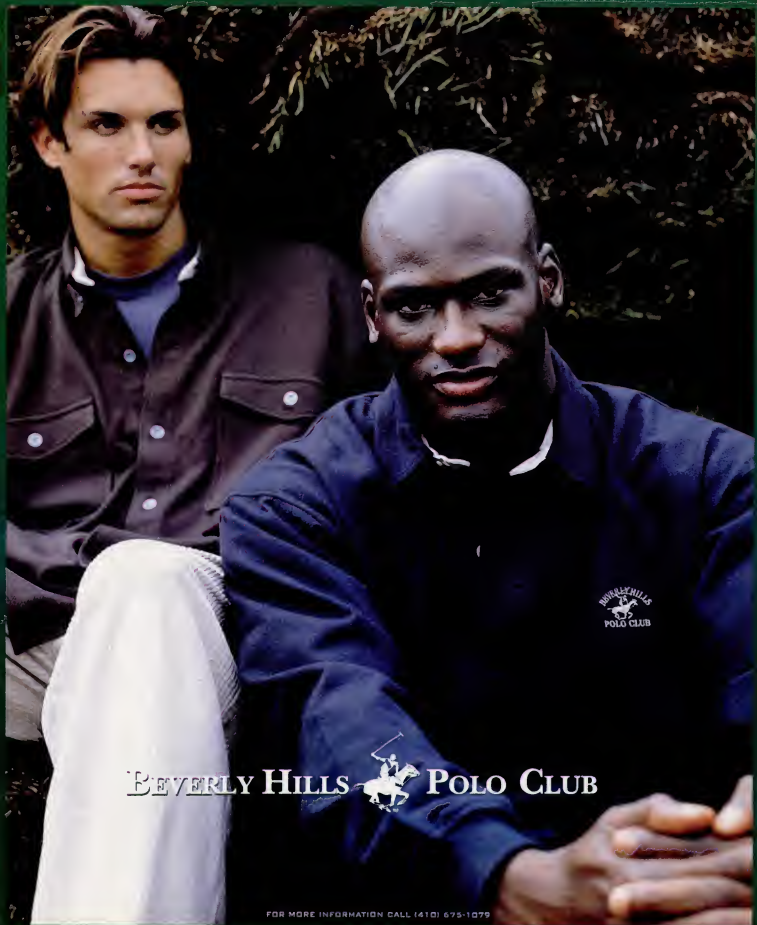
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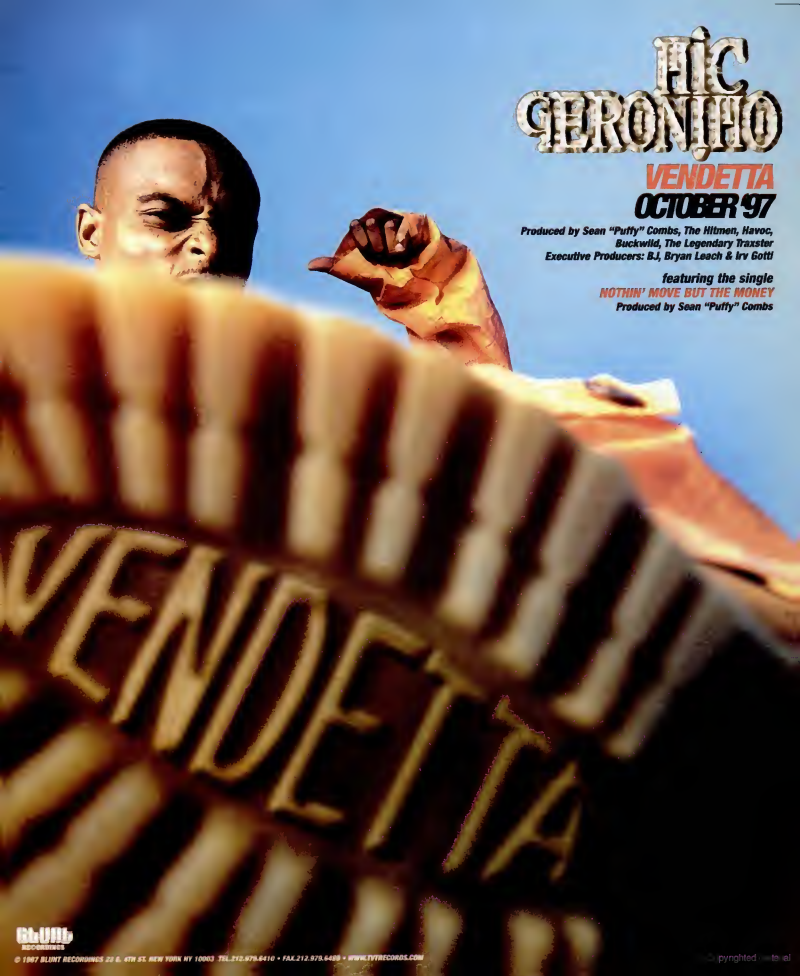
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ABOVE

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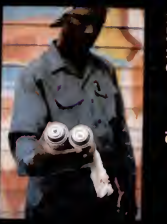
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Danyl Smith, VIBE's new editor-in-chief, stayed for a lil' while with pop diva Janet Jackson for "Janet's Back" (page 84). "Janet's totally intimate and completely evasive at the same time," says Smith. "Edgy and a little corny. I've been into her for a long time." Smith wrote VIBE's October '94 cover story on Miss Jackson as well as a chapter about her for *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock: Trouble Girls* (Random House). Smith was VIBE's music editor before accepting a one-year National Arts Journalism Program fellowship at Northwestern University. An Oakland native, Smith also wrote the introduction to the recent book by VIBE's editors, *Tupac Shakur* (Crown).

Jonathan Franklin took a trip into dangerous territory when he visited a colony of white separatists in the Ozark Mountains for "God City" (page 100). "I hope people will pay attention to what happened at the Oklahoma City bombing and ask, 'What in the world is going on?'" says Franklin. The 32-year-old Bostonian dedicates this article to his inspiration: all high school history teachers. Franklin's work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Playboy*, and *Spin*.

"I want people to understand how grounded Rashid really is," says Scoop Jackson, who kicked it with the MC known as Common for



DANYEL



JONATHAN



SCOOP



STEPHANIE



IRA

"Making Sense" (page 92). "I've known him for a while, and it's something special to watch a brother mature and accept all his responsibilities head on." Jackson, who lives in Chicago, is currently on a nine-city tour for his book, *The Darkside* (Noble Press), a collection of his essays and articles.

SWV got comfy with photographer Stephanie Pfriender, 36, for the "Dream Girls" feature (page 108). "I chose a paparazzi theme because the girls seem most relaxed when performing. I got to their true spirits," says Pfriender. Her photos have appeared in British *Q* and *New York*. Pfriender also shot the cover for Sheryl Crow's 1994 CD, *Tuesday Night Music Club*.

Jazz critic Ira Gitler paid homage to his old friend and legendary jazz great Thelonious Monk for this month's Props (page 160). "Monk's persona and integrity as a musician was—and is—about believing in yourself," says Gitler. The 69-year-old Manhattan resident has schooled people in jazz history at the Manhattan School of Music, the New School of Social Research, and at City College of New York. He's currently working on a biographical encyclopedia of jazz for Oxford University Press (due in '98). The Philadelphia native was included in a photo exhibition at New York's Julie Saul's Gallery in September, and in October, both her photos and drawings were shown at the White Columns gallery in New York.

Sacha Jenkins, VIBE's new associate music editor, ponders the phenomenon known as plays hating in "Get Off My Cloud" (page 47). Jenkins has written two VIBE cover stories—Bone Thugs-N-Harmony (May 1996) and the Fugees (June/July 1996)—and is a cofounder of ego trip. When he's not scouring the streets for the latest music talent, he can be found playing one of his six guitars... Photographer Arnaldo Anaya-Lucena shot "Night & Day" (page 118). Anaya-Lucena, once an ad director at Ralph Lauren, has also been featured in *Esquire*... Eve M. Fowler put her hands where Busta Rhymes could see 'em—wrapped around a camera—for "Follow the Leader" (page 96). The Philadelphia native was included in a photo exhibition at New York's Julie Saul's Gallery in September, and in October, both her photos and drawings were shown at the White Columns gallery in New York.



THE VELVET ROPE
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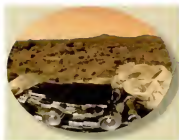


Executive Producers: Janet Jackson and René Elizondo, Jr. Q-Tip of A Tribe Called Quest appears courtesy of Jive Records. "The Velvet Rope" album project produced by Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis (for Flyte Tyme Productions, Inc.) and Janet Jackson. <http://www.janet-jackson.com> © 1997 Black Doll, Inc.

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the moon, late 1960's



mars, late 1990's



corolla, 1998



my, my,
how things have
changed.



corolla, 1968

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SECOND COMING

I think the September article on Wu-Tang ("Right and Exact," by Mimi Valdés) was the greatest article I've ever read—especially since I'm their biggest fan! I've read every article and own every album that they've released. The article was very informative and is further, undeniable proof that RZA is the wisest and most diabolical scientist in the music industry. I can't wait for his LP to be released. Also, as a concerned fan, I want to know what Meth meant when he said, "I'm gonna disappear in five years."

James Avasso
New York, NY

Excuse me! Why in the hell did Method Man cover his face on the front cover? That is disrespectful toward his fans. That was so wrong of him. He knows us ladies want to see his sexy self on the cover, and he bet' not try to disappear in five years, 'cause if he does, I'm gonna come looking for him.

Frutty
Richmond, VA

QUEEN BEE

After reading your article on Lil' Kim ("More Than a Lil' Bit," by Karen R. Good, September), I reached one conclusion: She is more confused about herself than ever now that her lover Biggie is gone. How can any woman accept the fact that she was only a mistress in a man's life? That makes her a home-wrecker! I found it truly heart-breaking to read that Lil' Kim actually put a man like Biggie before God in her life. That truly comes from her lacking a male role model in her home. Biggie may not be here but God always is! What happened in your life does not

have to shape your future. Pray and don't give up!

Greg Brunson
Newark, NJ

Lil' Kim has a unique and original method of getting her image and messages across. When I talk with my friends about the *phat* video for "Crush on You" or say how much I like Lil' Kim and her style, the girls in the conversation usually say, "Ronnie, how

I love when you do articles on Lil' Kim. A lot of females have no reason to criticize her. If you have a boyfriend, you are going to do all of those freaky and wonderful things to satisfy him so that he'll satisfy you back. I stand behind Lil' Kim 150 percent because I do get down like that with my man in bed, and we have no shame. All women who dis Kim need to be real with themselves, because even if you never had

shown once again that he is deviating from the pure teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Perhaps the minister no longer believes in his own lessons. And as for whites' joining the NOI and becoming brothers of blacks, when Wallace D. Muhammad and Malcolm X uttered these same words and thoughts, it was Minister Farrakhan who called them hypocrites. But now he's singing the same song. Farrakhan's followers are in spiritual confusion.

God King Allah
Comstock, NY

Farrakhan has mastered mastermind control—the act of projecting his thoughts into the minds of others. Now, don't get me wrong, he has some good thoughts and ideas. Farrakhan has subconsciously ceased being real and honest with himself and now tells his followers whatever they want to hear. Farrakhan has diminished his connectedness, and, in the process, he's eroding his spiritual power.

J.W. Ellis II
Abilene, TX

BIG MISS-TAKE

Kierra Mayo must be a close friend of Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott's because anyone who would write a raving review about her album, *Supa Dupa Fly* [Revolutions, September], must be her girl. Mayo is

fooling herself and her readers when she proclaims that Missy is delivering some of the most creative rhymes for a female MC. Missy's line in "The Rain," "Beep, beep / Who got the keys to the jeep / Vroom," is arguably the worst line in any song ever! Yeah, Missy has a different style, but it's far from creative—"annoying" would be a more accurate term. Missy Elliott's album affirms the age-old axiom that different isn't always good.

Chana Garcia
Wilmington, DE

I feel that Missy is one of the nicest people in the music industry. She wrote songs for

**"I stand behind Lil' Kim
150 percent because I get
down like that with my man
in bed. We have no shame."**

could you like that nasty b@#\$!?" In response, I usually say, "You call her whatcha want, but you won't call her broke!!!" That usually shuts them up. Kim, all I gotta say is, When you get dissed by females and fellows, shake it off like Jell-O.

Ronnie Crawford
New Rochelle, NY

I give much respect to Lil' Kim. Now I know who she really is. I wish her much success. And I hope that she can find a man who loves her for her and not for her money and body. Good luck, Kimberly Denise Jones!

Talicka Harris
Phoenix, AZ

I think Lil' Kim looks so ugly in your September issue. She is not a Queen B@#\$! I consider her a Queen Beaver; her two front teeth are so long it's sad. Also, that blond wig has to go. She looks like a drag queen/monster. I don't understand how a 22-year-old woman could sit there and call herself a b@#\$! She mentions in her interview that she often stays in Biggie's condo; well, maybe she should use some money to buy her own place. BOUNCE!

Sagar
Queens, NY

to do whatever she did to get money and a place to rest her head, you all still get down like that sexually, and you know it.

Pocahontas
East Point, GA

ORGANIZED CONFUSION

Minister Farrakhan is in grave error ("The Chamer," by Farai Chideya, September). When he agrees that the inherent condition of evil and rebellion to divine law by whites can be changed, he has



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Aaliyah, 702, Jodeci, SWV, and many more. I give much props to Missy: Keep doing your thing! Oh, and go on a tour, please!

*Chatilla Morris
Long Beach, CA*

RADIOHEAD

Given the quality of female DJs here in New York City, I found it disappointing that VIBE should give credibility to Wendy Williams [Power Move, by Jeanine Amber, September]. As Naughty by Nature's Treach once said, she's "trash," nothing more than an audio prostitute willing to say or do anything that will keep her no-talent, fake, Valley Girl-accented self on the air. Although I am no expert on her recent exploits—as I have stopped listening to her—it is despicable to make a career out of disgracing, humiliating, and sometimes endangering the careers of today's many rising black R&B and hip hop stars by spreading gossip over the airwaves.

*DJ Tony Love
Brooklyn, NY*

KEEP ON KEEPIN' ON

When I first saw the article "Live to Tell" [by Farai Chideya, September] about how to raise a family when you're HIV-positive, I thought to myself, Here we go again, just another story about a dothead feeling sorry for himself. When I finished reading the article, I had so much respect for this woman that I felt ashamed of myself. Keep your head up, Dawn. You're going to make it.

*Donald Pritchett
Oxon Hill, MD*

SNOOP TROOP

I didn't appreciate the fact that you stated Snoop Doggy Dogg was suffering from severe Dre deficiency ["Look Out Below," September]. As I see it, Snoop is able to show his true talent without Dre. He's very talented, and *The Doggfather* shows that he's matured. He gets much love and respect.

*W.M.A.
Victorville, CA*

YOU'RE BUGGIN'

I read Dr. Snakeskin's review of Ronald Armstrong's 1997 film *Bugged* [Dr. Snakeskin's Home Video Views, December/January], and it was straight-up foul. But what I don't understand is the letter in the August issue by a Rex Reed wannabe, N Smuve, calling the film "sorry" and "substandard." Just because Armstrong doesn't have \$50 million to produce his flim, it shouldn't count against him. Saying our people pro-

duce substandard product is unfair given the fact that Hollywood is a boys' club that gives whites all the resources, facilities, and opportunities and leaves blacks with table scraps. Although *Bugged* is low budget, it's slamin'!

*Gary P. Brown
New York, NY*

Recently, I rented Ronald K. Armstrong's *Bugged*, and I must admit I LOVED IT. It was a brilliant mix of horror and comedy, altogether hilarious. Unfortunately, I am upset by a comment made by N Smuve from Cincinnati regarding the film. The reader called the film "sorry" and supported the film review by Dr. Snakeskin. What is truly sorry is the fact that this person did not actually see the film but proceeded to bash it anyway. What kind of ignorant person comments on something they know nothing about? As for Ron, all I can say is, YOU GO, BOY!

*V. Calabrese
Bronx, NY*

I DREAM A WORLD

As a 19-year-old, dedicated hip hop disciple who also happens to be gay, I was very OFFENDED by the comments made by Louis Turner and Gary M. Longstreet in the "Let's Talk About Hate" section of the August mail. Unfortunately, our world isn't perfect. That's why people like me choose to stay in the closet; in some areas my future depends upon it.

*name withheld
Norfolk, VA*

PARENTS JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND

It's considered odd for a suburban white kid like me to be so heavily into hip hop. My parents aren't exactly into my love for hip hop or my love for people in general. I wish not to repeat what they constantly say to me about dating black women. Reading this magazine makes me thank God that I didn't end up like my parents. I love VIBE because even though you focus on minorities, you cater to everyone. You slam racism in everyone's face, showing the facts before you start throwing opinions. Keep up the good work, and I'll keep on buying it.

*Ian M. Kowalewski a.k.a DJ-e
Ocean City, MD*

VIBE encourages mail and photographs from readers. Please send letters to VIBE MAIL, 215 Lexington Avenue, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10016. Or send E-mail to vibe@vibe.com. Send photos to VIBE: YOUR BEST SHOT (name address, include your full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Photo submissions will become the property of VIBE and will not be returned.

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Dick



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"I've Been Around the World, and I-I-I-I've Been Playa Hated." A select history of hated playas. • "Hound Dog" Elvis Presley, 1956 • "Fairies Wear Boots" Black Sabbath, 1971 • "Back Stabbers" the O'Jays, 1972 • "The Boys are Back in Town" Thin Lizzy, 1978 • "Controversy" Prince, 1981 • "White Horse" Michael Jackson, 1982 • "Parents Just Don't Understand" DJ Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince, 1988 • "Freakin' With the Drive-By" Dr. Dre, 1993 • "Grrr" Fat Joe, 1995 • "Playa Hater" the Notorious B.I.G., 1997

Start

They're easy to spot. **The playa haters.** Always up in the bleachers yelling marvelous trash. They're life's spectators, remote-control drones who curse the souls of successful, self-confident folk, both dead and alive. Those cats will never win the Heisman Trophy or a PGA tournament. Ask Puff Daddy (a *champion* player)—he'll tell you. As long as your eyes and ears are focused on your game, can't nobody hold you down.

Remember when you launched off that checkerboard lily pad/showroom floor in your metallic purple BMW? Thick polluted breeze caressed your mane as you levitated past the bustling crowds that lined Northern Boulevard in Queens—but you didn't give a much. At that moment, some steroid-pumped, honky-tonk Batman and Robin cop team could have pulled you over right near A&P and shoved the hot dog-thick end of a wooden plunger up your fleshy back door, and you wouldn't have gave a much.

Because you were about to cruise control that ass back to the 'hood—looking luxurious, Ayatollah style. Your joyous eggplant mug shamelessly reflected off the thousands of broken glass pieces that littered the sidewalk in front of Julio's bullet-proof convenience store. Did you honestly think that *nobody* was peepin' your flamboyant moves? Everybody saw; they just *pretended* not to watch. That's hatred.

And speaking of watches, that dangling Rolex of yours certainly couldn't have helped—people saw that shit too. Fools were foaming at the mouth. But I'm sayin', I thought you had better sense than that. Steppin' to local heads on the *physical* level because they stepped to you, *verbally*, on the jealousy tip? What were you thinking? That was like jumping out of an Army-issue, "Be all that you can be" green helicopter into the Atlantic Ocean—right where mad makos marinate—with 140 pounds of choice beef wrapped around your neck. I guess I understand, K-Borne, why you're slung up in Astoria General, decorated with multiple bullet scars. You shoulda known that playa haters hate because they hate *themselves*. And someone who hates *themselves* is one bloodthirsty, unpredictable shark. With rows and rows of faux-gold teeth.

You shouldna came at those suckers like the way you did—it's not like they grappled your precious jew-ells. They only touched your pride. Remember "Sticks and Stones," brother? You should have handled your business the way Method Man does—and Mick Jagger before him. You shoulda just been, like, "Hey, you

Get off my cloud."

Seche Jenkins

"I Can't Drive 55" Sammy Hagar, 1984 • "(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (to Party)" Beastie Boys, 1986 • "Turners" Turnex Social Club, 1989

Splitsville, USA Mo' frowns at Motown as Andre Harrell steps down

UPTOWN TO MOTOWN...



ANDRE HARRELL
CEO/President Motown

IT'S ON!

October 1995

Two years ago, PolyGram, the Dutch entertainment conglomerate, hired two men to head up a pair of its American music divisions. Thirty-five year-old Andre Harrell was wooed away from his own Uptown Entertainment for a reported \$30 million and was charged with returning Motown Records to its rightful throne—atop the mountain of modern soul music. Ten years Harrell's senior, Danny Goldberg—also founder of a successful company, Gold Mountain Management—was

assigned the task of digging Mercury Records out of the industry basement.

By August 1997, PolyGram was set to promote Goldberg from Mercury's president to Mercury's chairman, a post from which he'd oversee operations at Mercury and Motown. That's when Harrell resigned. "PolyGram came to Andre with a bunch of allegations," a source close to Harrell says. "They tried not to honor his contract, but Andre refused them, and the company paid him out in excess of ten million dollars."

Many record industry professionals say that Harrell wasn't given enough time to revitalize a company that has relied on catalog sales for more than a decade. "It was extremely unfair," says Harrell's former protégé, Bad Boy Entertainment CEO Sean "Puffy" Combs. "He was only given a year and a half to turn Motown around. A label that really didn't have a lot going on."

PolyGram has, in the past, been accused of pulling the rug out from under its black executives. Lisa Cortés—whose imprint, Loose Cannon, was folded after only two years of existence, in 1996—is currently suing the corporation for gender and racial discrimination.

In fairness to PolyGram, however, there were other factors at play. In place as Mercury president, Goldberg began paying his bosses dividends almost immediately, sending a string of early signings up the charts. Rock bands the Cardigans, 311, and Hanson (who, oddly enough, sound very much like Motown's golden-era Jackson 5) have all gone platinum during Goldberg's tenure, while Mercury's overall market share has tripled.

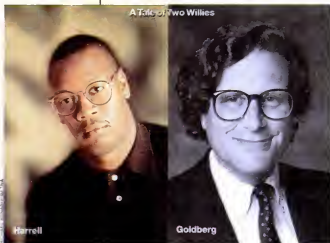
As for Harrell, after inheriting the vaunted title of Motown president and CEO, he got off to a

rocky start. His million dollar introductory campaign—full-page ads, subway posters, and television spots featuring a stogie-smoking Harrell proclaiming "It's On!"—went against PolyGram chairman Alain Levy's advice and drew heavy criticism in the media. Even more damaging was his decision to release Boyz II Men's 1995 remix album without consulting the band. The move drove a wedge between the multiplatinum quartet and their label, and, in February 1996, the Boyz signed a production deal with rival Sony.

"Making hits is not a problem," Harrell once boasted. Unfortunately, the acts that he signed to Motown haven't produced any. The self-titled, 1996 debuts of Horace Brown and female R&B outfit Shades barely moved 90,000 units combined. This September, Taral Hicks's *This Time* hit stores to lukewarm reviews, and the much-hyped Jason Weaver's first offering still has no release date. In his 22 months on the job, Harrell lost \$100 million for the company, *Forbes* magazine reported.

Now, the man who promised "I'm gonna live Motown Records" is gone, and some fear that all the future holds for the label is reflections of the way life used to be. "Our guess," a friend of Harrell's says, "is that PolyGram will break Motown down into a catalog-only label."

Meanwhile, Harrell is in the process of setting



up another entertainment company of his own, and MCA Records is rumored to be lining up a top spot for him.

bullets point-blank news

• LOUIS MCCALL (1952-1997)

Louis McCall, the 45-year-old drummer and cofounder of the seminal funk/R&B band Con Funk Shun, was shot and killed this past summer in an attempted burglary at his home in Stone Mountain, Georgia. McCall appeared on all the group's recordings, including 1971's No. 1 R&B single "Fun" and the classic slow jam "Love Train" (1982). "Lou was like the beat on 'Love Train,' cool and laid-back," says Con Funk Shun lead singer Michael Cooper. "I will miss that beat—and his smile." At press time, there were no suspects in the crime.



• SCORE ONE FOR JESUS

One of sports' brashiest personalities has signed with the God squad. Football and baseball star Neon Deion Sanders, citing an ugly divorce brought on by extracurricular female pursuits, has declared himself a born-again Christian. But don't expect a tamer on-field version of Prime Time, whose end-zone celebrations are inspired by his home Hammer. "If I had scored—oh my God," Sanders said after a recent near touchdown. "I might have climbed up the goalpost and tried to give the Lord a high five."



No matter what kind of success Goldberg had with Mercury, his new job is an affront to some. "They're tryin' to put all this hype on Andre Harrell," Combs says, "—not letting you all realize that Motown is now ran by Daniel Goldberg, who I know ain't in the streets every day fuckin' with young niggas. I know Goldberg's not living and breathing and eating the soul of what we do. That's what Motown was based on. That's what Motown meant." *Meant*, indeed. Harrell or no Harrell, with the exception of Boyz II Men, the home of black pop is suffering—has *been* suffering—a long, big chill.

OJ Lima

Death Knell Is Death Row records strapped to the chair?

Under stiff pressure from its parent, Seagram Co., Interscope Records will drop their distribution deal with Death Row Records before Seagram's national shareholders meeting takes place in Montreal, Canada this November.

Seagram board members made it clear to their chairman, Edgar Bronfman Jr., that it was time to sever ties with the violence that hovers in and around Death Row, the New York *Observer* reported in August. Interscope Records would not comment on the alleged impending breakup, while Death Row lawyer David Kenner stated, "As far as I know, nothing has changed in [our] relationship with Interscope." Kenner is recovering from open-heart surgery.

Death Row and Interscope once enjoyed an unflappable union. They proudly released top-selling, controversial material, and stuck together through a tumultuous 1995, when criticism of gangsta rap forced the two companies out from under the Time Warner umbrella. (Seagram paid \$200 million for 50 percent of Interscope the next year.) But with the recent high-profile murders of Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G., Death Row CEO Suge Knight's incarceration for parole violation stemming from a 1992 assault conviction, and a federal racketeering probe of the label reportedly nearing conclusion, the

Suge Knight in comfier days



waters appear to be too hot for Interscope cofounders Jimmy Iovine and Ted Fields. "We know there's been lot of pressure around Death Row," an Interscope spokesperson told the *Los Angeles Times*. "We've been grappling for months with this issue. We have a distribution pact that is still in full force and effect."

Thom Mrozek, a spokesman for the United States Attorney's office in Los Angeles, refused to confirm or deny an investigation of Death Row by the federal government for racketeering and links to street gangs. But the *Times* reported that federal agents have conducted extensive interviews with West Coast music executives and scoured thousands of pages of Death Row financial papers, and that their investigation may soon climax in a

grand-jury indictment.

Interscope's successful diversification of its roster also makes it easier to part with Suge and co. With hits from R&B group BLACKstreet, nouveau-ska outfit No Doubt, and industrial-rockers Nine Inch Nails, plus the presence of Dr. "I ain't no gangsta" Dre's Aftermath Entertainment, losing Death Row won't have as much impact on the label's bottom line as it might have had before.

Sales figures at the Row itself are nowhere near the multiplatinum action that has generated up to \$100 million in years past. According to SoundScan, Snoop Doggy Dogg's sophomore album, *The Doggfather*, has sold around 1.8 million copies (less than half the total of 1993's *Doggystyle*). Released with little fanfare, not one of the label's most recent works—*Death Row Greatest Hits*, the *Gridlock'd* soundtrack, the *Lady of Rage's Necessary Roughness*—has achieved platinum status.

Furthermore, lawyers representing the record company and Tupac's mother, Afeni Shakur, have come to an agreement regarding a suit that alleged Death Row cheated their late star out of millions in royalties. "The Shakur case was settled," said Kenner. "The whole thing." In the deal, Afeni was given ownership of all Tupac's unreleased material (reportedly more than 150 songs), which will be marketed and distributed by Death Row.

Finally, rumors of Suge's being stabbed in the neck with a sharpened chicken bone at the California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo are false. "He's just fine," said Kenner of his jailed partner. "He's being treated just like anyone else would [be] in there."

Frank Williams

bullets point-blank news



• YOU GO, YOKO

East met West 125th Street when a Japanese tourist won *Showtime* at the Apollo's amateur night twice in a row. Yoko Kanno, 24, an aspiring R&B singer, overwhelmed the notoriously skeptical Harlem audience when she belted out Chaka Khan's "Through the Fire" last August. Kanno, who can sing in English but can't speak it, said through an interpreter that she read about the competition in a Japanese magazine. "The audience," said Chuck Sutton, the show's coproducer, "had no idea that she could blow like she did."



• STILL SINGLE

Although *Living Single* is back in FOX's fall lineup as a Thursday-night anchor, the future of the series remains uncertain. After rumors that the top-rated show among black households would not be renewed, the Fox Broadcasting Company purchased 13 episodes—less than half of a full season's worth of shows. Executive producer Yvette Lee Bowser says she is "excited but dubious" about the upcoming fifth season. "Either we will rejuvenate *Living Single*," says Bowser, "or we just end it gracefully."



Tucker? He didn't even know her

All Eyez on Cheese

A crowd gathers around Tupac's estate

Afeni Shakur sat seething in a Los Angeles courtroom this past August. California law requires an estate be split between surviving parents if—and this is the case with her late son, Tupac—there is no existing will. So Afeni looked on as William Garland, Tupac's estranged father, told a probate judge that he deserves a share of his son's multimillion-dollar fortune. Garland recently proved paternity through DNA testing, but he disappeared from Tupac's life in 1976.

"I'm the only person in here who lost somebody," Shakur shouted after Garland's testimony. "He doesn't even know my son's birthday!"

Meanwhile, in a Philadelphia federal court, anti-gangsta rap activist C. DeLores Tucker and her husband, William, have filed a complaint of "intentional infliction of emotional distress and slander" against Shakur's estate. The suit cites lyrics from Tupac's 1996 "Wonda Why They Call U Bitch": "Got your legs up trying to get rich / Keep your head up and your legs closed, dear Ms. DeLores Tucker."

Among other things, Tucker claims that Tupac's words diminished her sex life, robbing her of "life's pleasures" and causing her husband to lose the "advice, companionship, and consortium" he enjoyed with his wife.

Tucker did not return VIBE's phone calls. New York attorney Richard Fischbein, coadministrator of Shakur's estate, told the Associated Press that he was bewildered by the suit. "It's hard for me to conceive how these lyrics could destroy her sex life," he said. "But we can only wait for the proof to be revealed in court."

Indeed, it's hard to conceive how anything could slow down that sexy mother, Tucker.

Aliab Wright

bullets point-blank news



• UNDERCOVER MAKEOVER

New York *Undercover*, starring Malik Yoba and Lauren Velez, has undergone a serious overhaul. Now in its fourth season, the series (still untitled at press time) has changed its fictional story location from Harlem to Downtown N.Y.C. The music performances have been dropped, and three new cast members—Marisa Ryan, Josh Hopkins, as well as Tommy (formerly of *Martin*) Ford, who fills in for the departed Michael DeLorenzo—have been added. "Our intent is to breathe new life into the series," says executive producer Dick Wolf.



• DO RIGHT WOMAN

Even after a lifetime in the business, the Queen of Soul continues to jump to it. In addition to completing work recently on the film *Blues Brothers 2000*, Aretha Franklin has been accepted into the prestigious Juilliard School to study classical piano. "Aretha has taken different classes over the years," says Franklin's spokesperson about the natural woman, who began playing piano at age four. "But she's very excited about studying classical music and about attending one of the best schools in the country."

Spotlight

on the Underground by the Blackspot

Cutliss fans of Brooklyn's underground maintenance man, *Street Smartz*, will be overjoyed to know that he's coming out with a video this winter. Smartz and the rest of the Tru Criminal family shot a clip for "Don't Trust Anyone" a few months ago in New York, and it features freestyle phenomena Lord Finesse and L.S. (formerly of Rumpeltiskin), along with up-and-comers the God Sunz. There aren't any speedboats or stretch hummers in "Don't Trust," so don't expect to see it on MTV. The Box will be your best bet.

The sweet smell of nostalgia kicks in every time I pop in this one tape called the *Freestyle Files*. These Brooklyn kids called the Council sent it, and the little reel always puts me in the mood for an old school-style bat-



tle. Straight off the dome, Nat Turner, Niggy Notz, Mighty Buda, and Sulaiman fling brain-tlinging skills onto a Maxell over instrumentals of already-released records and looped-up beats from the crib. A baby's voice harassing them in the background adds an unusual realism to the atmosphere. Take heed when the Council take Chuck D's 1996 "No" and deliver a rhyme fest called "Yes"—it's a sure sign that four talented volcanoes are about to erupt. Call 718-824-3287 to look further into their lava-vacuous lyric flow.

On the London scene, Mark B and Delirious (phone number: 011-44-181-715-1931) have an unorthodox, blazing remix of their song "The New School Dean." MC Delirious destroys Mark's sci-fi beat, picks up its carcass, and then uses it as an instrument to make you say "Whoah? Who dat?!" On the other side of the two-track demo, the original "Dean" walks a couple of paces behind; but either version's radio-friendly funk would pleasantly bless any label's catalog.

Unsigned and Underappreciated?

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MACY'S

William S. Burroughs 1914-1997

Writer. Addict. Homosexual. Antihero. William S. Burroughs, along with novelist Jack Kerouac and poet Allen Ginsberg, was a key figure in America's mid-century Beat movement.

His most famous book, 1959's *Naked Lunch*, brims with paranoia and Burroughs's cold, pitiless humor—a kind of hallucinatory slapstick through which Burroughs portrays the dementia of heroin addiction and the notion that language itself is a virus. Praised and denounced in equal measure, the novel faced obscenity charges that were not cleared by the Supreme Court until 1966.

Dubbed the Father of Heavy Metal by punk poet Patti Smith, Burroughs exploded language with rabid, nonlinear narratives. Marked by the narcotic ellipsis of dreams and by grotesque, madly antic excursions into sex, his style was not a far cry from Wu-Tang's nastiness or Dr. Octagon's sci-fi gynecology.

Burroughs also foreshadowed hip hop with his "cut-

up" technique. Snipping text from newspapers or another writer's work and mixing it with his own, he created a random, disassociative literature analogous to the collage of samples that make up a vintage Public Enemy track.

As crisply sober in demeanor as he was renegade in spirit, Burroughs spoke slowly and eloquently and always wore a suit and tie. With his unblinking artistic vision trained directly on the bleak underside of 20th-century existence, William S. Burroughs helped shape a culture's dark conscience.

George Pitts

bullets point-blank news



DESIGNER JIMMIES

Reggae dancer Carlene the Dancehall Queen is no longer just shaking her booty. The creator of the international dance craze the Butterfly is now endorsing a line of condoms called Slam. The prophylactics, named for a hit song by Carlene's former beau Bennie Man, are studied and lubricated for pleasure as well as for protection. But why is this diva involved? "Men look at me as a sex symbol," says Carlene. "And women look at me. So I thought it would be good for them to have me." We'll take three.



BREATHE AGAIN

The American Lung Association is trying to make actors cough up a little responsibility. The group's Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! program awarded TV shows, actors, and actresses with "Phlemmyes" for their chimney-like habits onscreen. Winners included Michael Richards (Kramer of NBC's *Saturday Night Live*) for his "thick haze of cigar smoke," while Michael J. Fox received a "Pink Lung" award for his anti-tobacco habits on ABC's *Spin City*. No word on whether tilt lover Method Man had planned to attend.

Sound Check

Bobbito plays the tracks,

Ziggy Marley states the facts



influence the music like it used to.

• Audio Two—"Top Billin'"

B: Have you heard this before?

Z.M.: Nah, man.

B: Do you like it?

Z.M.: This is all right.

It's more like listening to the beat, but it doesn't touch me soul. I love music that touches me soul.

B: This was one of the biggest hip hop club records of the '80s.

Do you like rap music?

Z.M.: I listen to everything—rap, jazz, blues, whatever I'm in the mood for.

• Bread—"It Doesn't Matter to Me"

Z.M.: Me kind of like this. Good for the bedroom. This creates something for me....Puts me in the mood to relax. Me like live music. I like the melody too.

• Musical Youth—"Pass the Dutchie"

Z.M.: They played this every day on the radio. People loved it. I was in high school. Musical Youth were cool. We all knew each other. The original was Diamond's "Pass the Kutchie."

B: Oh, this was a remake?

Z.M.: Yeah, the Jamaican version of herb is *kutchie*. Pass the kutchie around so everyone can smoke. The *dutchie* is a pot. Musical Youth were talking about food.

B: I don't know if this would have been a big hit in the U.S. if they were talking about herb. They probably would've censored it.

• Herbie Mann—"Cousin Home Baby"

Z.M.: Jazz, right?

B: Yeah man. Does this touch your soul?

Z.M.: Oh, yeah. Real music of life. It is moods. It has feelings.

B: It's like...it's of the essence.

Z.M.: I can meditate to this.

B: Would you smoke the coochie to this?

Z.M.: It's the *kutchie*, man!

B: My bad [gulp].

One of the fringe benefits of doing this column is the fact that, every so often, I get hit off with some fat-ass concert tickets. Well, my interview with Ziggy Marley this month yielded just such a return, and it was a humdinger, indeed! He and the Melody Makers *rocked* New York City's Central Park. It was a feel-good benefit show that had everyone from buttoned-down yuppies to hard-rock hoodlums to thick-headed Rastas swaying together underneath a lush canopy of trees. And Ziggy even did some of his father's tunes. I guess that treat was a preview of what was to come. The Melody Makers are working on a collaboration project very close to their hearts. They're blending their own new music with old tapes of Bob's—a posthumous family affair not unlike Natalie Cole's *Unforgettable With Love*.

• Max Romeo—"Chase the Devil"

Z.M.: Reminds me of the '60s of my youth. The popular music was of that kind, not about girls and shooting.

B: What happened to it?

Z.M.: A lot of people lost faith. That generation of artists was militant and conscious, especially in the inner cities of Jamaica. Their whole lifestyle influenced the music. But things have changed. They got wiped out, and the new children coming up weren't getting the teaching. My father passed; others got gunned down. Now, politics doesn't

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Take This Job and...

These jukebox heroes once held down some less-than-glamorous gigs

If you don't work, you can't eat. Before their skills started paying the bills, some of today's big-name stars punched the clock in a variety of nonmusic fields. Peruse and wonder what might have been, and what could be, if all parties concerned listened to VIBE's advice on ideal employment opportunities. *Scott Pollack*

Big Gipp

Current Employment: One fourth of Atlanta's Goodie Mob
Former Employment: Stand-up lift driver in a warehouse



Work Comment: "I felt like a brick in a wall, y'all! I learned to block out what my body was doing [in order] to achieve what was important in my life."
Proposed Future Employment: Sword swallower, firewalker, bed-o'-nails sleeper

?uestlove

Current Employment: Drummer for the Philadelphia-based hip hop group the Roots
Former Employment: Telemarketer/insurance salesman
Work Comment: "Ten-hour-a-day shifts as a telemarketer prepared me for talking to journalists and interfacing with the public; thus, I'm the only one in the Roots who does press."
Proposed Future Employment: Ten-hour-a-day telemarketer for the Roots' overlooked records

DJ Kool

Current Employment: Club DJ, starting production company, Biggitt, that looks to capitalize on the success of his 1992 hit single "Let Me Clear My Throat"
Former Employment: Removed trash from the Pentagon
Work Comment: "The trash contained top-secret information. If anybody got caught going through it, they'd be arrested."
Proposed Future Employment: Democratic National Committee fund-raising liaison to China

Yuka Honda

Current Employment: Food-obsessed

lyricist and lead singer of quirky East Village (via Japan) duo Cibo Matio
Former Employment: Culinary journalist, translator
Work Comment: "Rent! Rent! Rent!"
Proposed Future Employment: Uhhh—landlord?

Nell Diamond

Current Employment: Flagship Columbia music artist... Last album, 1996's gold *Tennessee Moon*, was recorded in Nashville with country artists
Former Employment: Ages 10-14: worked in father's haberdashery store serving customers (including women trying on bras), shoe shine boy, Ages 14-17: bellhop, busboy, camp counselor at hotel resort in the Catskill Mountains
Work Comment: "I always felt lucky to have a job. I was happy to be earning my own money. My dad always put people before business; that is an ethic I still apply to my job today."

Proposed Future Employment: Create a clothing line modeled after Wu-Wear, simply titled Diamond Wear

Lateef the Truth Speaker

Current Employment: Member of Latrux, an underground, independent rap duo affiliated with DJ Shadow's *SoleSides* label collective
Former Employment: Lab assistant: DNA chromosome research
Work Comment: "I learned a lot at the genetics spot about the practice of science as opposed to theory. It definitely stretched some of the boundaries of thought for me."

Proposed Future Employment: Store



manager, "Clones-R-U's"

Heavy D

Current Employment: CEO of Uptown Records, recording artist, thespian
Former Employment: Butcher, gas



station attendant, dock worker
Work Comment: "I learned the value of hard work and being on time. Those jobs prepared me. I knew that I wouldn't be doing that stuff forever and that I wanted something different."
Proposed Future Employment: Overweight governor, in the house

Junior Kimbrough

Current Employment: Sixty-six-year-old Delta bluesman, last album titled "Most Things Haven't Worked Out"
Former Employment: Farmer for 30 years (started working at age 6), mechan-



ic at John Deere for 12 years
Work Comment: "A man has got to work. Music is a job, but it sure beats farming."
Proposed Future Employment: Recipient of \$100 million winning lottery ticket

Etc....Etc....Etc.....

The Predator became the prey July 24 when two men broke into Ice Cube's house in Encino, California and stole a wad of cash, electronic equipment, and a van. The incident was just one in a string of celebrity-home invasions in the San Fernando Valley this July. Quiet Riot guitarist Carlos Cavazo, 40, was pistol-whipped and robbed of \$200 and some jewelry at his Sherman Oaks residence. And Suge Knight's girlfriend and another woman returned to Knight's plush Woodland Hills abode to find a man with a pistol waiting to take \$50,000 worth of jewelry and cash from them. The LAPD has not determined whether the crimes are related...Debbie, ops, we mean Deborah Gibson, 27, is taking it to Broadway! All electrically grown-up now, Long Island's favorite mall mow was scheduled to take over the title role of *Beauty and the Beast* on September 24. She plays the Beauty...On August 20, American Airlines officially apologized to its Latin American customers for offensive language in a company manual. A section titled "Survival in Latin America" warns pilots that Latin American passengers get drunk on board and, if they're running late, might phone in false bomb threats to delay flights. "We hold our Latin American customers in the highest regard," said airline spokesman Tim Smith. They just want to be your Papi Chulo, can't you see?



classic
chanda



A woman is sitting on a swing, wearing a white and blue Reebok tracksuit and orange sneakers. The background is black. The text "classic chanda" is written in a stylized font at the top. At the bottom, there is a Reebok logo and the word "CLASSIC" in a blue box.

Reebok

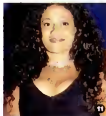
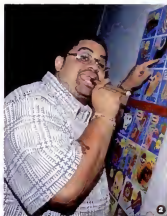


In the MIX

The Good Life

1. Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott seems to be having a supa dupa fly time at Puff Daddy's secluded home in New York's East Hampton. (2.) And can't you just hear Heavy D. frantically yelling "The ice cream man is coming!" while running out of Puffy's front door? 3. Don't worry, fellas—Tyra Banks is not married to actor Jean Claude LaMarre. This photo is actually from the set of David E. Talbot's forthcoming film, *A Woman Like That*. 4. Mr. Dalvin and T-Boz, however, are definitely doing the happy-couple thing at the Atlanta club Esso on Dalvin's 26th birthday. Might these two be getting married soon, for real? 5. Pebbles gives Organized Noize's Rico Wade, as well as Tony Rich and the soul stirrers known as 4.0, some on-site advice. 6. Is Gerald Levert schooling Flava Flav—or vice versa—in the ways of a playboy at Def Jam's *How to Be a Player Ball*? 7. On the Manhattan video set of SWV's "Someone," Taj redefines the meaning of animal attraction. 8. Songstress Nancy Wilson and Dionne Farris bump into each other at N.Y.C.'s Supper Club. 9. Don't Mess Def (the newest jack in the Native Tongues posse) and urbanwear designer Marc Ecoque seem a bit too fascinated with the gadget flashing before their eyes? Relax, guys, it's just a camera. 10. International teen heartthrobs the Barrio Boyzzy after a hot performance at Tavern on the Green, where N.Y.C.'s La Mega 97.9 hosted an AIDS benefit. 11. Remember R&B teen queen Tracie Spencer (1991's gold "Tender Kisses")? Well, homegirl ain't much of a girl anymore. Check her out looking all grown-up at N.Y.C.'s Official All Star Cafe. 12. Twista, the MC who rhymes at the speed of light, gives his tongue a rest long enough to smile at the Fontainebleau Hilton in Miami. 13. Always the stunning jazzbel, Cassandra Wilson, with friend Isaach de Bankolé, stages an elegant arrival at Rockefeller Center's Guild Theater, in N.Y.C. Why? The premiere of Spike Lee's *4 Little Girls*.

Margeaux Watson



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Think about it. *Hey you* is not exactly the most endearing greeting, especially to someone who took the time to shop at your place and who spent their hard-earned money on one of your cars. *Hi, Yvonne* or *Hi, Steve* doesn't seem like it would be asking too much. It's certainly how we would like to be greeted if we were bringing in our car. Of course, it would go even further if our name were Steve, but hopefully you get the point.



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start

Dance-music diva India Arokia rocks the Nu-yorkian social show at N.Y.C.'s Hammerstein, 10 J.D. Jazz Jiff, also at the Hammerstein, flexes his mixmaster skills. Who knew he was still 'tchin' for a scratch? Work never ends for Nickelodeon sitcom top dogs Kenan and Kel. Here they are at N.Y.C. Official All Star Cafe promoting *Good Burger*. Singer/songwriter/producer Mr. Shell NdegeOcello cools down a hot audience at N.Y.C.'s Central Park with her sweet plantation lullabies. 17 Although Wu-Tang coined the phrase "Protect ya neck," Mary J. Blige gives it new meaning at an autograph signing at George's Music Room in Chicago, Illinois. 18 No doubt, we love Dr. Hill's singing...but their clothes? Backstage at the Bronco Bowl in Dallas, Texas they resemble Count Chocula, Bo Diddley, Frankan Berry, and Frankenstein more than platinum-selling R&B soul boys. 19 Contrary to the lyrics of their hit single "G.H.E.T.T.O.U.T.," Changing Faces do well all by themselves onstage at N.Y.C.'s Radio City Music Hall. Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson at this year's *Essence Music Festival* in New Orleans prove their love truly is solid as rock. 20 It's been a long time since TAFKAP performed live in the U.S., but the audience at the Coca-Cola Lakewood Amphitheatre in Atlanta, Georgia can testify that this sexy MF's stage show is still a bona fide goli experience. M.W.



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Tomorrow, the World

Consequently the man became great and went on advancing more and more and growing great until he got very great.

—Genesis 26:13

start

A rival organization has been identified as a potential threat. It is necessary to confront this challenge so that it doesn't conflict with our present plans to muscle in on the media via TV, film, radio, and publishing. Our strategies in business are as diverse as the global market itself. The competition is immense because there are literally millions of opportunities out there for the taking.

News from our West has indicated that a certain interplanetary concern known as the Schwa® Corporation has put out a "World Operations Manual" that's printed on treated vegetable pulp and advocates alien domination. These big-headed, bug-eyed creatures see human beings as "stick people" to be herded like cattle and controlled by dominance and manipulation. We know them, because many of us work with these mimics every day. First they implement various methods in business—utilizing, actualizing, publicizing, even subsidizing. Then they begin to distribute instructions on how to take control of and run a small planet. Now, more than ever, the human race must act as a global race.

Fixing this problem will require hard work and discipline, but with a well-thought-out plan, our timeless human hustling techniques can lead us down the yellow brick road of prosperity. In accordance with the old maxim Follow the cheddar, we can expect them to target America's major corporations as well as financial districts within economically strong countries around the world. That's how we beat them!

They're too "smart" to understand that the stock market isn't the only way to make ends. They're sleeping on we, the people, ignorant of the fact that Communism's investment of choice is Community Relations. For down-to-earth young folks like you, me, and the rest of the Justice League Federation, this will be an all-important aspect of our survival portfolio because it enables us to achieve a competitive advantage through social responsibility.

Simply put, y'all, this world is influenced by the two percent who run things from satellite holdings. They not only got the juice to cut your lights, they're

probably aliens too. But the wealth they possess is just the monetary side to their success. Real strength is found in wisdom, organizational skills, and a spiritual reservoir some of them will never understand. That's why not only are we inducting National Interns into the JLF, we're interviewing for international and international ones too! Ten countries pack more wallop than a few stick people. So we formed a federation, which will be a group of organizations working for the common good.

The blank expression on some of your faces suggests a valid question: How do we organize a venture of this size? The answer comes in two parts: first the Business Plan, then the strategy. The plan was agreed upon last month: to embrace

and keeping them in pocket.

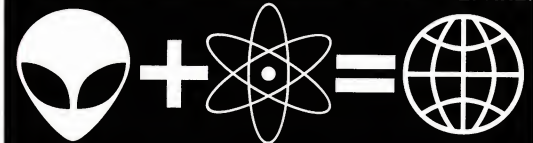
After years of learning how to lose, it feels great to be ballin' with powerful, confident players every day. I've learned that the most successful people in everyday affairs tend to be the best pool shooters, especially if those balls become small planets in their minds. That's why I named my private company Ballz, Inc. O., because in business, size matters. Like my Consigliere "Stix" taught me about rollin' out the "Stönz" rack after rack: Ya can't nevuh lose if ya play yuhself!

As in any venture, to have confidence in your game, you must put in the time and effort to acquire a high level of skill. Aliens can't comprehend this. To them, such contests are all just primitive behavior. But consider Matthias, our

preneurs? Are any foundations giving students technical training? How can our community open a support center for pregnant women and nursing mothers? Where can I get help in working on reforestation and building aqueducts before the rain forests are destroyed? And will the Justice League really help to create jobs outside the rap industry? Well, we at the Justice League are working to provide answers. And we must, because our competitors don't play games!

What the Schwa Corporation out of Nevada fails to realize is that they're dealing with some down-to-earth people who don't have their heads up in the clouds. To the aforementioned mimics, who care only about control, any lasting investment in our neighborhoods seems

YOU MAY NOT BELIEVE BUT YOU CAN PREPARE.



SCHWA: WORLD OPERATIONS MANUAL

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One of our most valuable strategies occurred to the executive board while shooting a game of nine-ball. The same rules apply in pool as in the "game of life." The object is to knock balls of any color or denomination into the appropriate pockets. To succeed, you must bounce off obstacles, play all the angles, and think three or more shots ahead at all times. To do this effectively, you have to perfect certain techniques—the grip, the bridge, the stroke, the follow-through—and discipline yourself to repeat them automatically in the heat of competition.

Hustlers come in all races, faces, and places, but they share a common trait: The ability to convert their knowledge of pool and human nature into money. They may use completely different approaches, but all have the killer instinct of IRS auditors, the nerves of high-wire walkers, the courage of bomb-disposal agents, and the self-assurance of brain surgeons. At the JLF, we're applying the same simple strategies learned in the pool hall to implement our business plans. We've found that these strategies can aid in racking up judges, lawyers, bankers, businessmen, and journalists—

League Underboss. He's developed a love for mastering "the art of war," which is chess. He studies the attack positions, the strengths and weaknesses of our crew. Matt started seeing the eight-by-eight board as a neighborhood of 64-block radius, inhabited by predominantly black and white residents. He analyzed all the pieces, differentiating them into categories such as drug dealers, crackheads, and enforcers. Now he's truly an asset to our franchise. Today, Matt wears a "bulletproof chess" mentality and his vision force is his mind to extend the 64 blocks of possible turf into a global marketplace. For him, the game is mental warfare, a time-honored strategy that can kick the "e@%&S outta them aliens!

Plain and simple, this is a game of survival. Well, plain, yes; simple, no. In the time of battle, successful directors are those who can answer tough questions like: Whose soldiers are better trained? Whose discipline is more effective? Whose system of rewards and punishments is clearer? For those of you who are new to this page, these are the questions we ask ourselves in these monthly sit-downs. Are you concerned with questions like: Who'll set up a loan fund for entre-

preneurs? Are any foundations giving students technical training? How can our community open a support center for pregnant women and nursing mothers? Where can I get help in working on reforestation and building aqueducts before the rain forests are destroyed? And will the Justice League really help to create jobs outside the rap industry? Well, we at the Justice League are working to provide answers. And we must, because our competitors don't play games!

National and International Interns, for your phone interview, please dial 900-772-5130, extension 169. Call anytime. Have pen and paper ready to defend our position!

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Reel Life

Bridgett Davis blasts cinema stereotypes

If you had to sum up filmmaker Bridgett Davis's budding career in one word, it would have to be "tenacious." If you were granted two, tack on "resourceful." In 1992, the English professor at Manhattan's Baruch College decided to try her hand at the novel. As writing progressed, Davis began to feel the story she wanted to tell would be better expressed as a screenplay. Fourteen rewrites later, she realized she had to learn to make a film ("I had a lot of help from Third World Newsreel," she says, "a women of color-run filmmaker's collective" [call 212-947-9277 for info]). After much creative financing and endless late-night and weekend shoots, Davis emerged from her Steenbeck editing table with *Naked Acts*. The film is a passion-swept exploration of one young black woman's history of sexual abuse, eating disorders, and what the auteur calls "issues of body-image and non-sexualized nudity."

As performed by the brooding Jakeann Jones, Cicely, the film's protagonist, is a walking, talking seedbed of neuroses, eroticism, and unexpressed anger. A 27-year-old actress who's just lost 57 pounds—in real life, not real life—Cicely refuses to bare it all for her first movie role. The centerpiece of the movie has her cathartically confronting her mom, Lydia Lowe (played by Patricia DeArcy), a former exploitation star. Seems that while Mom was on-set drooling for the camera, her boyfriend was backstage molesting her daughter.

Naked Acts is also a film about filmmaking. It examines how far we've come and how far we have to go in portraying black female sexuality onscreen. Davis offers both a postfeminist look at the Pam Grier era and a critique of the way some black male directors treat black men and women onscreen. American cinema could use more like Davis—Amazon women on some never-say-die shit.

If you haven't caught *Naked Acts* (completed three years ago) in the coming attractions at your local Bijou, it's because Davis has been unable to find a distributor. This isn't an uncommon turn of events in the independent film world, except that Davis's picture already has won over audiences from Milan to San Francisco to Burkina Faso, West Africa. At press time the film was scheduled for an early 1998 release in select

cities—opening in Manhattan. Until then, Davis will most likely be keeping her head up and her focus straight ahead.

*Would you describe *Naked Acts* as a feminist film?*

When I made the film, I didn't think I was doing anything radical at all. I don't consider myself that way. Yet the industry response to the work has taught me that I did do something progressive.

view in *Variety*, in which the writer described who the audience for this film was—not only a core audience of African-Americans and women but a crossover art-house crowd. Suddenly, a lot of distributors who had taken a look at the film started backpedaling. I get a lot of backhanded compliments—like "well written," "good performances," "really good first film...but we don't think we can sell it."



THE SHOW MUST GO ON

"For the longest time, I wanted industry acceptance," says filmmaker Davis. "Now, I understand I've got to step out and self-distribute."

I dared to make a film that was about the internal life of a black woman. It wasn't contextualized by the ghetto, it was softened by comedy, and it didn't focus on male bashing. The momentum in the film is motivated by Cicely's wanting more from her life. That forces you to accept the character as human. And black folks' humanity is a scary thought for a larger world. They don't say that, but after three years, I know the code language.

Talk about the code language.

Well, it used to be "The lead actress, she's so angry." Then it evolved to comments about how "We don't know who the market is for this film," which they lay on a lot of black filmmakers. Total crap. Last May the film got a strong re-

Did you try the Sundance Festival as a means to get distributors interested?

I actually had Geoffrey Gilmore, the director of the Sundance Film Festival, tell me that he wasn't racist and that a lot of thought went into whether or not to take *Naked Acts*. I got a form-letter rejection; so I was, like, *Huh?* Ultimately, [Gilmore] said he didn't have any voices on the selection committee supporting my point of view. This was a big education in how that stuff works.

When I tell that story, some people say he was probably the loudest opponent of the film. Who knows? I'm not saying it to badmouth him, but Sundance is critical to the life of most independent films—and almost mandatory for a certain kind of black film that does

not revel in the same old clichés.

It's been a long time. Where are you at emotionally with the project now?

For the longest time, I wanted industry acceptance. I didn't want to make the film and have to do the work of distributing it too. But what I've come to understand is that it's a necessity. I've now shown *Naked Acts* in twenty countries in Europe and Africa. When it showed at an open-air theater in Burkina Faso, that was one of those moments when you decide it's all been worth it. Just to be able to show my film under the stars in West Africa—a film in English in a French-speaking country—and have people responding to it. There were long lines of people waiting to shake my hand. It made me realize the problem is the gatekeepers, not the audiences.

How did African men respond to the film?

In West Africa, I got incredible support for making a film that dealt with black women in a new way. In South Africa, a group of very intellectual men said, "Very good, very good, but do you really think her sexual abuse had anything to do with her problems?" I didn't understand then, but later I learned they've got a huge problem of men abusing little girls. Some men there think the cure for AIDS is to have sex with a virgin. So there's a whole cultural overlay that was brought to bear on the film.

Milan was the only place I had people asking me questions about aesthetics, composition, story structure. It was great because, by and large, in America, all you get are questions about the budget and distribution.

What was the best screening of all?

The first, at the Black Harvest Film Festival in Chicago. The organizers have really cultivated a whole community of black moviegoers who are informed and urbane about cinema. That audience's questions I never got again—and I thought they were going to be the norm. All kinds of things come up, like what was the significance of Billie Holiday's poster in one scene? But it was a good place to start out, helping I already had an audience. That has realized me stay as clear, focused, and as uncompromising as I need to be.

Black-Owned
.....
By
Greg Tate

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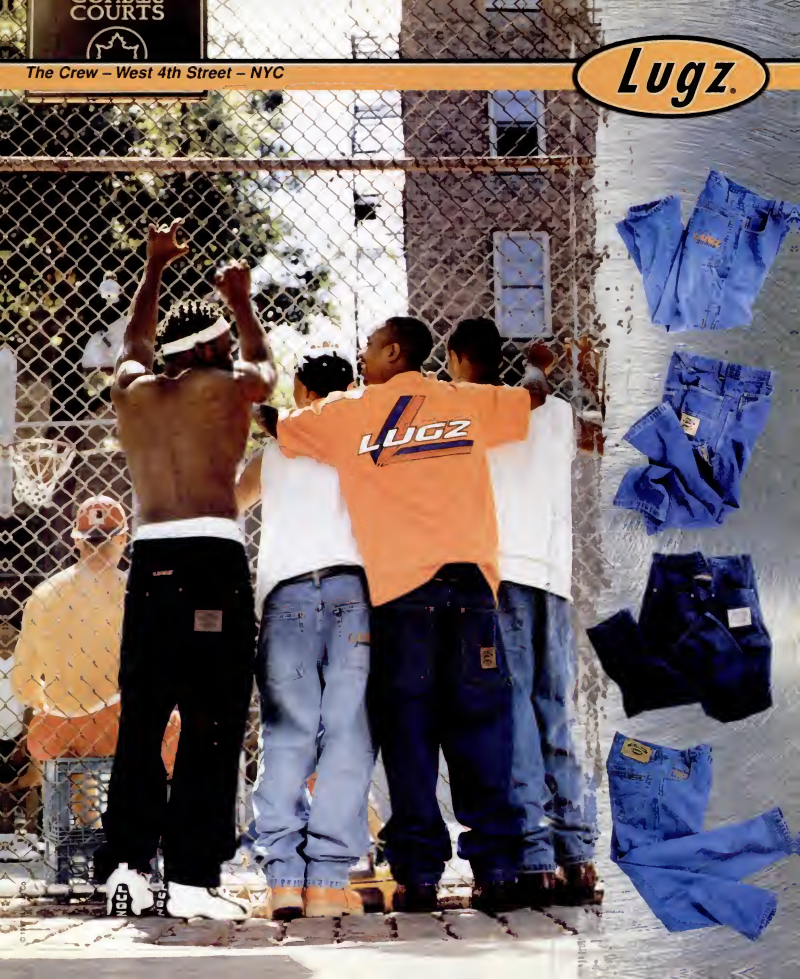
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Left out on the Right

Black conservatives look for a way into the political mainstream. *By Farai Chideya*

The game: political multiple choice. The question: Who best represents black conservatism? A) Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who's ruled against affirmative action programs and magnet programs designed to desegregate schools. He's been lampooned twice on the cover of *Emerg* magazine—once as a lawn jockey and another time with an Uncle Tom-ish headrag wrapped around his cunium.

B) J.C. Watts Jr., the only black Republican in the House of Representatives, who favors federal funds for church-run programs but rejects the dismantling of affirmative action.

C) Charles Barkley, a self-described Republican who's best known for his basketball skills and his sharp tongue but who keeps toying with the idea of running as a Republican candidate for governor of Alabama.

D) Chris Rock, because his comedy routines about the difference between "blacks" and "niggas" ("Nigga'll say, 'I take care of my kids.' Always want some credit for shit they supposed to do") are making it cool to support traditional values without being accused of player hating.

Hold up—Chris Rock! How'd he get on the list? While we keep you in suspense about that mystery and the answer to the quiz, let's look at where black conservatives fit into American politics.

Nearly 90 percent of black people who go to the polls vote for Democrats, making African-Americans the single most predictable political constituency in the nation. Republican insistence on dismantling affirmative action and welfare and the party's opposition to reforming drug sentencing laws that provide harsher penalties for (mostly black) crack dealers than for (mostly white) powder cocaine dealers have only widened the divide. Black Republicans end up getting cut off on two levels—they don't have enough supporters to hold sway within the black political arena or the Republican party.

Raynard Jackson, the 36-year-old chairman of Americans for a Brighter Future (ABF), is out to change all that. ABF's mission is to get more blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans involved in and elected as Republican party members. And Jackson knows that Republican leaders want the same thing he does. "I gave a speech in Texas to the Young Republicans. There were two-hundred-and-fifty delegates, and maybe one black one in the audience," he says. "But white folks there are so hungry to change the face of the party that for two hours after the speech, people were asking me to help them [in their own communities]." He adds that "the senior party"—Republican leaders like House Speaker

Newt Gingrich, who's scheduled to attend an ABF fund-raiser—is looking for ways to make sure prospective black Republicans "know where to go and are warmly received once they get there."

It's no mystery why the GOP is reaching out to people of color: The stakes are high. "Only twenty to twenty-five percent of us vote," says Jackson. "So we've got a seventy-five percent part of the pie that's open. Anyone who taps into that market will have unimaginable success."

But that presumes blacks and other "minorities" are interested in joining the Republican ranks. Jackson thinks they are, or will be, once the Republican message is phrased in terms of traditional black values. "Individual responsibility—blacks want that.

community. Bill Stephney, 35, the owner of StepSun Music Entertainment, Inc. and cofounder of Public Enemy, sees the hip hop generation forging a new path between liberalism and conservatism. He was a key speaker at this year's first-ever Black Conservative Unity Summit—even though he doesn't describe himself as a black conservative. "There is definitely a generational difference," he says. "You have the black Republican conservatives who want to get paid and want a blond wife. Then you have the Far-rahman-inspired generation who don't believe all that but do believe in black men being involved in their families and entrepreneurship."

Stephney, who's been registered as an independent since he was 18, places himself in the latter group. "I definitely do not find myself in ideological agreement with traditional liberals who believe that the government should be educating black folks, feeding black folks. And I don't believe most of my peers believe in that either. Most rapers are civil libertarians; they believe in personal freedom and enterprise."

When asked what the government could do to help a teenage crack dealer, Stephney says: "The government somehow has to articulate that the talent he has as a crack dealer is a strong talent. We're not mad at him about the process—but about the product." Better education and access to capital for starting legal businesses are the rest of Stephney's prescription. "No one has ever heard of an old drug dealer, but a legitimate businessman like Russell Simmons is about to turn forty."

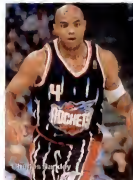
But Stephney breaks with many conservatives on race and gender issues. "I am pro-choice," he says. He's convinced that more young African-Americans will cobble together an ideology like his own, which encompasses a conservative belief in economic empowerment with a realistic knowledge of race relations in America. He points to Chris Rock—who's on his way to becoming our generation's best cultural satirist—as the artistic expression of the trend.

So what's the answer to the quiz? For now, it's none of the above.

Hard-liners like Clarence Thomas, party players like J.C. Watts, and even mainstream celebs like Barkley represent different faces of a movement that is currently both small and fragmented. If black conservatism catches on big time, it will need people like Stephney to lead the way—not the party faithful, but people looking for a new approach to old problems. And even though it's dangerous to look to entertainers for leadership, black Republicans could use a celebrity spokesman right about now.

Anybody got Chris Rock's number?

POWER



Welfare reform, reducing teenage pregnancy, creating environments where entrepreneurs will survive," Jackson says, reding off the black conservative agenda. "I think holistically the Republican message is better on point than the Democratic message."

And Jackson has a strategy for how to get that message across: "I suggest what we Republicans do is go Hollywood and high profile. Let's make some TV commercials—Barkley says, 'I'm Republican and proud of it.' Let's hear him talk about it. Let's get some people from the hip hop community."

Another survival tactic for black conservatives is to reach out to people who are feeling the message even if they don't fit the party label. This year Representative Watts joined forces with a Democratic congressman, Floyd Flake, to cosponsor the community renewal act, which would allow parents to send their kids to private schools using publicly funded vouchers.

Mixing up the old formulas may be the only way to tap into the political power of the hip hop com-

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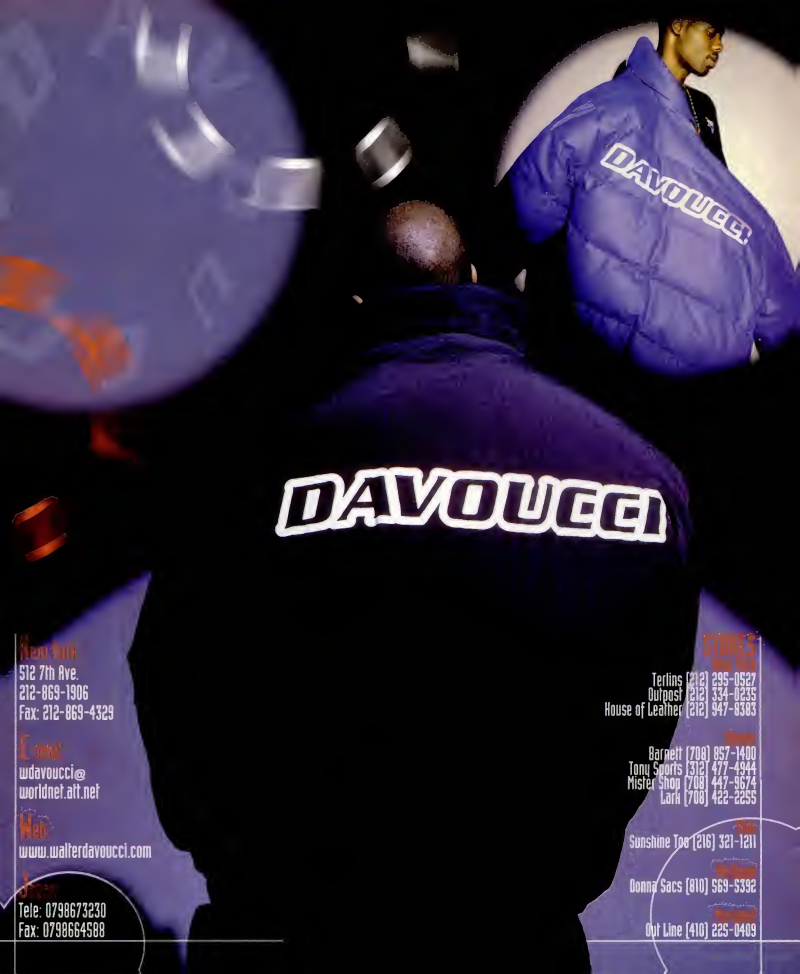
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Black Caesar

As the only black Republican in the 105th Congress, J.C. Watts Jr. stands alone. By Farai Chikaya

The Republican congressman from Oklahoma's 4th District represents mostly rural and suburban folks, 93 percent of them white. He supported Newt Gingrich's Contract With America and was handpicked by the GOP elite to deliver the Republican rebuttal to President Clinton's 1997 State of the Union Address. He also happens to be black. He is a 39-year-old former University of Oklahoma football star who goes by the name of Julius Caesar Watts Jr. Now in his second term, the rising right-wing star is a champion of conservative causes—he's anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, and supports sweeping welfare reform—who occasionally surprises members of his own party. This year, he was instrumental in pushing a resolution through the House of Representatives to make "June-teenth" (June 19) a national day of observance commemorating the freeing of Texas slaves in June 1865.

J.C. Watts strides into his congressional office wearing the usual Washington uniform with a twist: He's rocking black ostrich-skin boots with his navy blazer and slacks. He sits behind his desk and delivers the gospel of black conservatism like the Baptist preacher he is. "Pray as if the strength of our nation depends on it," he likes to say. "Because it does."

Does a name like Julius Caesar make you feel more powerful?

Actually, my father was given the initials J.C. at birth. Around the third grade, his teachers insisted that J.C. stood for something. He said, "No, it's just the initials." They still insisted it stood for something, so he said, "Okay, Julius Caesar." But his friends call him Buddy.

Why do so many black Americans dislike black conservatives?

The word "conservative" scares many black folks because it conjures up the image of George Wallace standing at the door of the University of Alabama saying, "As long as I'm the governor of this state, no Negro will enter these doors." Birmingham Police Chief Bull Connor was a conservative who turned

a firehose on black people because they wanted to sit at a lunch counter, have a cup of coffee, and eat a hamburger.

I could not have told you when I was in high school what a liberal or a conservative was. I knew, growing up under the roof of Buddy and Ellen Watts, that not only were you going to school but you were going to get civilized when you got there. And God forbid you got into trouble; you faced the wrath of Mom and Dad. You respect adults. Even the person that society would see as the bum in the community, you treated them with respect. You don't spend more money than you take in. If you make a mistake, you take responsibility for it and move on. These are the values and principles that I learned growing up in a poor black neighborhood on the



east side of the railroad tracks in Euflava, Oklahoma.

There are many in this nation who act as though the culture of the black community is stealing and crime and all the brutal things we see today. That is not the culture of black America. Black America is about family and responsibility, character and faith. That's what "conservative" is to me. But somehow or another, we've gotten away from that over the past twenty, twenty-five years.

Many black Americans support "conservative" ideas like giving kids vouchers to attend parochial or private schools, but they rarely support conservative candidates. Why?

I can speak at the Urban League during Black History Month and give what you and I would consider Republican, conservative messages. It never fails—some black person will come to me and say, "J.C., I agree with everything you've said, but there's a disconnect between me and the Republican party."

The black community's in a horrible situation.

You've got the Democrats on one hand saying we're going to get ninety-plus percent of the black vote; we don't have to do anything, they're going to be with us. You have the Republicans on the other side saying we're gonna win without them. You have the black community out in a political twilight zone looking for a place to land. I saw a poll which said that thirty-one percent of the black community doesn't identify with the Democratic party. We've got to market aggressively to that group.

In a previous interview, you called black leaders like Jesse Jackson "race-baiting poverty pimps."

The question was asked, "What do you say to black leaders who believe you are a sellout and an Uncle Tom?" It's interesting that no one would think to look at my track record and see what I've done.

But I don't mind their saying I'm an Uncle Tom—that's politics. But I believe that some use race and poverty to benefit themselves. Being a minister, I should never have used those colorful words, but I don't apologize for the sentiments in that I said.

What's your take on affirmative action?

I don't think we should determine who gets the job or who gets the promotion based on skin color or gender. But on the flip side, I'm not willing to concede it's a level playing field. Look at the *Fortune* 500 companies: Females, blacks, and Latinos are underrepresented on the board or in upper management. But at the same time, I understand the white guy who says, "J.C., I've got four kids; the black candidate has only one. Should I lose because God made me white?" Then the black person asks, "Should I lose because I'm black?" The woman asks, "Should I lose because I'm female?" Everybody feels like a loser.

I'm in a dilemma because there are inequities in the system. Maybe the way affirmative action is set up is not fair; but can you tell me it's a level playing field yet? It's a hard sell on me to say it's a level playing field. We somehow have to mesh it into a process of equity. I have tried to be a force of reason, if you will, on both sides of the debate.

Are Republicans upset you won't fight to dismantle affirmative action?

I feel no burden to play the role of the black Republican in the affirmative action debate. I'm black, so people throw me into the debate; but I've got bigger fish to fry. I think balancing the budget is extremely important. Welfare reform is extremely important.

You're the only black Republican in Congress. Do you ever feel lonely?

[Starts singing Elvis Presley's 1961 "Are You Lonesome Tonight?"] I don't feel lonely. The burden of leadership is sometimes heavy, and I accept that. I've got the track record of the last thirty years on my side. The record shows that we can't continue to do things the way we've done in the past. This generation of African-Americans, fifteen to thirty-four years of age, has heard the rhetoric, the same old solutions to our problems. And things have gotten worse. I think there are people out there thinking, "I'm willing to listen to what Watts has to say." □

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KING BRITT**Kingdom come**

IT'S ANOTHER HOT DAY IN New York City: Horns are pumping; people are cursing. But as I navigate the crosstown traffic on my way to meet Philadelphia's famed house music DJ/remixer King Britt, the music on my 'phones cocoons me. The source? An advance copy of *King Britt Presents Sylk 130 When the Funk Hits the Fan* (Britt's debut on his own label, Ovum). By the time I hook up with him, I'm chill like an Eskimo.

"The album," says Britt, 29, "is an 'emotion picture,' a soundtrack to life." A soundtrack based on his own life lessons, from peeping experimental god Sun Ra as a tender youth to dropping out of Temple University—with one semester remaining—only to spin backup for the always touring, jazz-juiced rap trio Digable Planets.

"It was a chance to see the world," says Britt of his first tour and of deferring his formal education. "But my moms was pissed." Nonetheless, the former marketing major returned to illa-delphia determined to establish himself in the city's enduring music scene. Along with his homie, techno-whiz Josh Wink, Britt crafted edgy remixes for the likes of Tori Amos and Zap Mama. It was a perfect fit.



"Everyone was after Josh for a solo [deed]," says Britt of his partner. "But we were, like, 'We're family, man.'"

Britt's "family" is comprised of lady lyricist Bahamadia, hip hop ensemble the Roots, and a host of other musicians, poets, and friends from the Philly boho scene who have united under the banner Sylk 130.

The fruit of their labors is *When the Funk Hits the Fan*, a waxy mellow platter that serves as a '90s update on the funk and soul sounds of the '70s and '80s (check the cover of Indeep's 1982 hit "Last Night a DJ Saved My Life," "Gettin' Into It," and "Life Is Forever Changing" to get the picture). Who would've guessed that Britt and Wink, two future-minded disc jockeys, could drop such a funk-filled gem? "I've always liked the band that had the big beat," Britt says.

Yet Britt makes sure his music reaches beyond mere slapping bass or borrowed samples. "The [music] scene in New York is all fucked up; people there don't listen to what's going on elsewhere," he says. "People in Philly are more open-minded—we listen to everything." Philadelphia freedom sounds righteous.

Chiedo Nkwocha

WILL JAGGED EDGE BE JUST ANOTHER COOKIE-cutter male R&B group plaguing our radio waves? "No," says J&E member Brandon "Case Dinerio" Casey while practically inhaling his shrimp appetizer at Atlanta's Brookwood Grill. "Our music is different because it ain't all about bump 'n' grind." Case—along with his identical twin brother, Brian ("Brasco"), and their two best friends, Richard "Wingo Dollar" Wingo and Kyle "Quick" Norman—fully embody that hip hop-tinged, R&B-with-a-churchboy-twist sound. Like Hebrew National Wieners, Jagged Edge have a higher authority to answer to.

"We're actually tryin' to say something in our songs," says Quick. "We ain't just talkin' about the act of doin' it, we're talkin' about things that go on in real relationships." Jagged's debut, *A Jagged Era*, consists mainly of tracks that cry out for old-fashioned stability. And with songs like "I'll Be Right There," "The Rest of Our Lives," and their bumpin' first single, "The Way That You Talk," (featuring verbiage from So So Def labelmate Da Brat and label chief Jermaine Dupri) the album definitely justifies their true-love fixations.

It was in southern houses of the holy, though, that Jagged found their vocal edge. After relocating from Hartford, Connecticut to Atlanta in 1990, Case and Brasco became active in the local church-choir scene; this led to their union with Quick, who also was a gospel crooner. Wingo Dollar got down with the trio's ministry through the suggestion of a friend, who happened to manage 112, Bad Boy Entertainment's R&B guy crew. Wingo eventually passed along J&E's demo to his homegirl Kandi (of Escape), who then passed

it along to Dupri. *A Jagged Era* is the outcome—a testament to intimacy from four rough-and-tumble 20 year olds in search of unconditional bliss.

"When we think about Jagged Edge, we think of a jagged-edge knife," says Case, breaking down the significance of his dagger tattoo. "There's a smooth side and there's a rough side. But both sides will cut you." Maybe the tattoo's crude design is an admission that love is a battlefield. But still, what do Jagged Edge have that other groups don't?

"They got me," affirms 24-year-old producer *du jour* Dupri over the telephone, post-shrimps. "And the will to be bigger than I want to be." *Raquel Cepeda*

From left: Ricki Wingo, Brian Casey, Kyle Norman, Brandon Casey



NEXT

JAGGED EDGE
Razor sharp

MIGUEL VARGAS
Brooklyn Tech
Class of '97 (Drexel)

twism

the world is mine

BELK'S
UP AGAINST THE WALL
MAISON BLANCHE

SHAMEICA CAREY
Performing Arts, Manhattan
Class of '97 (Hampton)

BEDA ILNSEHER
Fieldston High, The Bronx
Class of '98

ALI HARGETT
Fieldston High, The Bronx
Class of '98

GISELLE ASENCIO
Norman Thomas High, Manhattan
Class of '97 (CUNY)



"WE REPRESENT THE REAL," SAYS A SWEATY MR. Taylor. One half of the Bay Area rap squad WhoRidas, he's creeping around the set of Tha Alkaholiks' "Off the Wall" video, one eye peeping the models. "We represent the *nonfiction*."

But weeks later, when it's time to shoot a video for the 'Ridas' second single, "Talkin' Bout Bank," Taylor and partner King Saan find themselves spoofing the restaurant-jacking scene that opens *Pulp Fiction*. "Realness" was quickly abandoned for surrealism.

"I come out wild because I want people to get wild," says a sprightly King Saan. "And that's how I'ma start off my shows: Hey, man, if you ain't come here to kick it with me, then get yo' ass the fuck out."

Truth be told, Mr. Taylor (Meikeo Taylor) and King Saan (Hasaan Mahmoud) are 22-year-old infamous Hobo Junction crew. "It wasn't about a group at first," Saan says of the clique that also included underground heroes such as the late Plan B and Saan's sibling, Saafir. "We watched my brother do his thing," he continues. "Then Saafir and the rest of the crew told us to just start *writing*." Rhyme sketching soon became the WhoRidas' full-time square biz.

A year after Saafir's 1994 solo debut, *Box Car Sessions*, the collective independently released the EP *Hobo Junction*. The popularity of the WhoRidas' contribution, "Shot Callin' & Big Ballin'," helped the compilation sell more than

15,000 units and landed the 'Ridas a recording contract with Southpaw/Delicious Vinyl.

Enter *WhoRidin'*: Saan and Taylor's first full-length audio book, bound together by premium flavored funk beats from Saafir, Digital Underground's Shock G., and Tha Dogg Pound's Daz. The bulk of *Who's* lyric content, however, is steeped in caviar dreams: from the pursuit of it ("Pounds, Ki's & OZ's") to the love of it ("Stackin' \$") to life without it ("Down on My Luck"). It ain't hard to tell: The WhoRidas have their minds on their money and their money on their minds.

"Our favorite number is 999,999,999,999,999, decimal, infinity, then one more nine," says a snickering Mr. Taylor. "That's gotta be more than zeros, right?"

Cherie Saunders

"I THINK EVERYBODY SHOULD have a quieter side and a ghetto side," says an easy Mia X, sitting pretty in the unsullied living room of her new house. Mia's premier LP, *Unlady Like*, paid for it all.

"You have to deal with both types of people in life. Just because I rap hardcore, doesn't mean I'm in that mode all the time."

Unlady Like—which houses the same titanium rude-girl flow that made Mia famous around the Crescent City even before she was signed—lives up to its title. And Mia's remake of Salt-N-Pepa's 1987 smash "I'll Take Your Man" is up there with the tight-as-hell guest performances that she's put down on Master P's *Ice Cream Man*, the compilation *Down South Hustlers*, and Tru's bomb piece, "Bout It, Bout It." But 28-year-old Mia Young doesn't limit her groove to gats and high life: "Hoodlum Poetry" is a spoken-word blast that explores her deeper side.

"I lived in the ghetto, but I didn't have a ghetto household," says Mia, who grew up in what she calls a culturally conscious home near New Orleans's tough Seventh Ward. "The people who ask me what effect my music is having on the community—those are the same ones who used to laugh at my mama for wearing dreads."

Although Mia started rapping back in her high school daze, things didn't start to really pop until 1994. While working at a local record store, she met a real playa.

"I have to give it to my coworkers Denny and Emmett," she says. "They were the ones who told P about me. Next thing I knew, I was in California working on *Down South Hustlers*." Mia followed that with her *Good Girl Gone Bad* EP (No Limit, 1995), which, along with her various spots on other No Limit albums, primed heads for the sure-shot *Unlady Like* (featuring cameos by Foxy Brown, Master P, and speed rapper Mystikal).

"Now I feel at peace," she says. "I give all thanks to God that I am able to own a home. You think Virginia Slims came a long way, baby? Well..." Tony Green

NEXT

MIA X
Exodus



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Celebrate Your Specialness

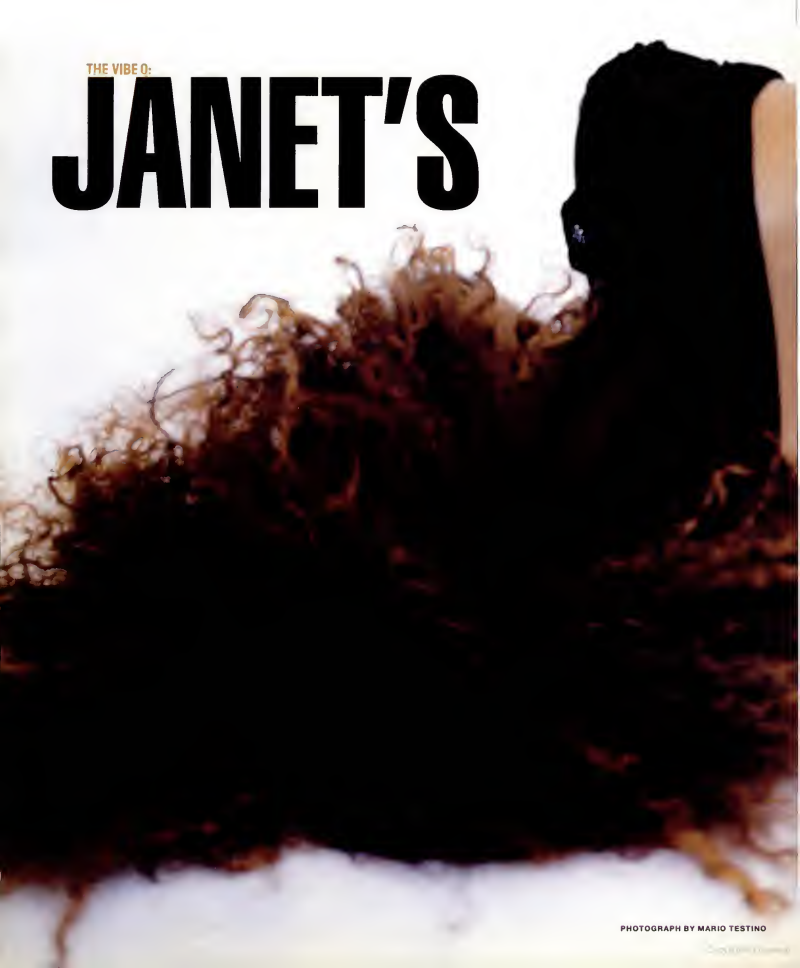
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THE VIBE Q:

JANET'S



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARIO TESTINO

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Miss Jackson talks about the pleasure in pain—and vice versa. By Danyl Smith

The whole thing is, she's not fat. Right up until the moment I see Janet Jackson—in a penthouse suite at New York City's Four Seasons Hotel—people are telling me that they've heard "Janet is fat now." They heard on the radio or from some other reliable source that Janet's been seen leaving KFC with buckets of Honey Roast. That her butt is wide, her tummy plump and mushy. "She's changed" is what they whisper gleefully. "Janet said, 'I'm eating what I want. Fuck a Versaclimber.'"

They wish.

When she walks into the sitting area of her suite—waist wee, eyes lined, lips

BACK

laced brickly brown—she looks like she has since she Lost the Weight. She's a 33-year-old woman who got her nose done when she was a girl of 16, who eats fatless soul food prepared by the chef she's employed for ten years now, who walks the treadmill, counting the calories burned, tallying the surreal miles toward Global Stardom. She lives in Malibu with René Elizondo Jr., her lover of 11 years. She talks about her antiques. About her dissatisfaction with the way she's dealt with mental trauma. Talks about hitting a boy when she was 13 because he took her food.

Whatever she talks about, she does it slowly. She paces before she responds. Enunciates. When you do that, you may sound too slow to yourself, like you're talking through molasses; but to the listener(s), you sound serene and confident. Thoughtful. Prepared. Too prepared, maybe.

And because these are cynical times, and because every "big" album is called "classic" before it's even in the stores, it's easy to start believing that we are all being manipulated into thinking Jackson's new album, *The Velvet Rope*, is art—pure emotion manifest—when the songs are really just an indestructible, strategically designed platform from which to maintain world pop domination.

So, what's up with this album?

It took me thirty-one years to do this album—my entire life. I had to run grab a tape recorder because I couldn't write as fast as it was coming to me. A lot of it is about pain. I don't know if it's something that we developed as a family, but I developed this way: If I was ever in any kind of pain, I'd find a way to brush it aside. Eventually it caught up to me. Actually, I should say the album took 26 and a half years, because there's one incident that I won't go into that happened to me as a kid.

When you were four and a half? You're not trying to go into it at all?

No.

Have you reached out to a professional?

René helped me a lot. Then I was in the desert one day [on a trip with René], and I met this guy. He's in his fifties, and he's a cowboy, and he's full of wisdom. The way that I see him is as my Obi-Wan Kenobi.

Well, should all have one.

Yes. The day our paths crossed, he looked at me and told me about me.

Did he know who you were?

Yes. He's not psychic. He saw me. I felt like I was ass-out, but naked. I was sitting in front of this man who I had just met, like, a half hour ago, crying my eyes out. There are times when you don't feel deserving of what you have. Feel fraudulent. For me, it has to do with my past and my childhood.

Should another girl have the life that Janet had?

I wouldn't want them to.

Was it the stage and the cameras? Your family?

It was everything. I started working when I was seven. When I was ten, I had a serious full-time job. I had a contract with a studio, and I had to be there on time every single day.

This is when you were Penny on Good Times?

Yes. I enjoyed it—but were there days [when] I was lonely? Hell yeah! I missed my family. I missed Michael.

He was doing *The Wiz*. We had a hiatus coming up, and I remember asking mother if I could go to New York and visit him because I missed him so much. I went to Studio 54 for the first time with Michael.

You went to Studio 54 when you were 10?

The only kid sitting up in the place, seeing people pretty much butt naked. I was loving it.

You had a life, Janet.

I was having a great time. But I could have swung in another direction. I could have gone to drugs, or drinking. There was cocaine everywhere back then. Someone could have said, "Hey, try this."

You don't regret your life, though?

I don't regret it at all.

Check in the mirror, my friend

No lies will be told then

Pointin' to the finger again

You can't blame nobody but you.

—"You"

Are we friends? Yes. Are we enemies? No. Have I spoken to my brother recently? No, I haven't. It's kind of embarrassing.

Janet is not just a voice. She sings (her voice is pretty and small), and she writes. She comes up with melodies. She makes music. Janet says she's always resisted taking credit for her writing. She says, like she's admitting to a misdemeanor, that this album is the most personal, wrenching work she's ever done. And you know with that "Man in the Mirror" reference in "You," she ain't talking to nobody but big brother Michael. She even sounds bratty just the way Michael did circa 1987 in "Leave Me Alone." The song is spat out over a snatch from War's 1972 "Cisco Kid." You can definitely feel that "was a friend of mine" vibe.

Are you feeling competitive with Michael?

Yes.

Is it hard for you?

Because we're brother and sister?

Yes.

No. Because it's business. I love him. He knows that.

Right...

I know that he loves me.

Was that hard for you to come to?

That was very hard for me to come to, and I didn't

realize how—how do I say this correctly—how much business it was with him and I until a few years ago.

It's hard to say this because he's your brother.

Go ahead, say it.

Michael is a legend in his own time. There will never be another Michael Jackson.

Right.

I just don't know if there is a Michael Jackson right now. Right.

The Jackson right now is Janet. I'm wondering how you deal with that.

It's hard. It's very hard for me. That voice inside my head starts talking. I ask, why me? What did I do to deserve this?

To deserve all this adulation?

Yes. I called my mother and asked her. She said be thankful. So I try not to question it. I used to do all the time because I felt guilty.

For being a winner?

I felt very guilty for being a winner when maybe someone else in my family wasn't doing as well as I was.

That must have been hard.

There are lots of times where I would ask, God, why can't you just make us all be on the same level? Why is one of us excelling more than the other?

Did you feel this way before Control? You know, when Michael was Mr. MTV and Mr. Thriller—did you wish everybody could be "even" then?

No!

You wanted to be a star?

Yes! I wanted to be a star! But I was so happy for Michael. I remember when he did Thriller—he had a serious sound system in his car. He played the album for me there. I'd never heard anything like it.

How old were you?

A teen-ager. I was so stoked for him.

Does he get excited about your work?

From what I hear, yes he does.

From what you hear? Have you guys had any good talks recently?

[No response]

I guess I'm asking, are you friends right now?

Are we friends? Yes. Are we enemies? No. Have I spoken to him recently? No, I haven't. It's kind of embarrassing. I hate to say how long it's been since I've even seen my brother—two years. But he's on tour. I haven't even seen my new nephew.

Janet!

I know. It's horrible. I know.

Are you guys going to be all right?

Yes. It's nothing like that. It's just that, when everyone was invited to the ranch to meet [his new son] Prince, I was doing the album, and there was no way I could even come home for the day.

That's kind of deep.

It is. I mean, the last time I saw my brother and spoke to him was when he was in the hospital. He was supposed to do the show for Pay-Per-View or HBO or something—it was the night of the 1995 *Billboard* Awards, and I was supposed to receive an award that night. I didn't even go accept my award. I went straight to the hospital.

You haven't seen him since then?

I haven't seen him since then; I haven't spoken to him since then.

PLEASURE PRINCIPLE
"I'm not known as high tolerance for
pain. From the things I've had
placed—in my nipple, my tongue."



PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLEN VON UNWERTH

Did it have to do with that "Scream" single? I thought your voice was mixed down kinda low. I was wondering why I couldn't hear you.

I wondered why you couldn't hear me either. We went back [after the session] and put my vocal up, and it sounded better. That's pretty much all I can say because I don't know what really happened. I wasn't there.

You were singing when you were in the booth, right?

Oh yes. I recorded my part in New York, and I didn't like it. So I sang it again in Minneapolis, at Jimmy and Terry's studio where I felt comfortable. [Michael] was there too because he wanted to re-sing his as well. He re-sang his, but his first pass at it in New York was the shit. I don't know what happened, but I felt I was mixed down too. It sometimes happens, you know. I wish they would have pushed it up a little bit more. I think "Scream" was the best video out. But it didn't have anything to do with me being in it or anything like that.

What about the times

You lied to me

What about the times

You said no one would want me

What about all the shit you've done to me

What about that?

What about times you yelled at me

What about the times I cried

You wouldn't even hold me

What about those things

—"What About"

So, what is *The Velvet Rope*? Art? Hype? Maybe, as with Janet's breakthrough album, 1986's *Control*, it's both. The 20-year-old newfound command of self, combined with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis's superb music—combined with the power of a huge entertainment conglomerate—connected with more than five million fans. *Rhythm Nation* was about Janet tackling "big issues"; but the music was fierce, the big-budget videos were mesmerizing for the time, and she sold another umpteen million units and played to sold-out arenas around the world.

Four years later, Janet was "about" Janet's blossoming sexuality—but was it really? Or was it just calculatedly "hot" and "sexy"—a big vibrator for our rhythm nation's collective clit? (Batteries not included.) It's hard, though, to think Janet—with beautiful songs like "Again" and "That's the Way Love Goes"—was all spin. And now, with *The Velvet Rope*, it's all about Janet Jackson getting into her "self." She writes songs that allude to some unnamed childhood trauma. She sings of hiding a lot of pain—and that segues really nicely into the idea that she herself may be semi getting into "pain" as arousal. She and her longtime love have written a song, about bondage. Not to accuse her of making up trauma for the sake of drama or of creating fetishes just to flourish—but you can't help thinking that real life needs a remix to go platinum.

What about your self-esteem? Most people assume that you always feel absolutely perfect.

No—are you kidding? That's the furthest from the truth. I have never felt attractive.

To whom? To men?

Period! Just period!

What about after you lost the weight back in 1990?

Did I feel better about myself after losing the weight?

Yes, I did. Did I still feel ugly? Yes, I did.

People didn't tell you were ugly when you were little?

No. That's just the way I felt when I looked in the mirror. I was shocked when René and I got together.

What brings you joy, then?

René brings me joy; work brings me joy.

You've been with René for a long time

Since 1986. We were friends for, like, four or five years before that. Like, best friends.



You guys have a good relationship?

We have a very good relationship, and it's due to us being good friends in the beginning. It's weird to kiss your friend for the first time. It's also hard work—

To keep a relationship going?

We work at it.

Did I see you at the Essence Awards with a diamond?

Everyone thought it was an engagement ring. It was a birthday present.

Do you like not being married?

I'm not afraid of marriage. I just like where we are right now.

[Phone line beeps] Janet, hold on for one second.

Sure. It's okay.

I just told my cousin Khalief that I have Janet Jackson on hold. I've got a few family issues tonight.

Don't worry. I can understand family issues.

Dancin' in moonlight

I know you are free

'Cause I can see your star

Shinin' down on me

—"Together Again"

Together Again" is a big, perfect, Donna Summer ode, all "MacArthur Park" and "Last Dance," and you just know the spirit of Ray Vette (who played the DJ in *Thank God It's Friday* and who died tragically) is dancing on his celestial ceiling.

Janet Jackson gives it all the way up in this, her tribute to friends who have died of AIDS-related illnesses. I mean, not to compare it to other extremely beautiful

songs that play with our despair, but that song her brother died, 1991's "Gone too Soon," about the little blond boy with AIDS? "Together Again" tops that. Puffy's chart-destroying "I'll Be Missing You"? "Together Again" kills that. This four-minute song is true disco dying for a 21-minute extended mix. The joint is hot to death. Literally.

What was it like working with Q-Tip? Do you like his voice?

I love his voice. I know René is probably sick of me saying God, I love Tip so much. He was real quick in the studio.

So you, Tip, and Joni Mitchell—

I spoke to Joni over the phone and told her we used her sample. Everyone keeps saying don't even bother. I called her up myself, told her how much of a fan I was and how my brother Randy introduced me to her work. And she said we could use it! I was stoked.

What's your favorite Joni Mitchell song?

"Beat of Black Wings." I love it. As a matter of fact, Joni called and asked me to be on her tribute album.

So you did that one—the "Wings" song? How did it work out?

I like it a lot. I just hope she does. You just don't touch greatness. It's like, Leave it there because you can't go any place with it. For her to ask me was such an honor.

Speaking of how you feel about not touching greatness, I'm wondering how come you're not working with Puffy? How come you're not working with the fabulous Babyface?

It's a really thing, for one. Jimmy and Terry and I work well together. There's still more within us to give. Though that's not to say that if I were to do something with Babyface that I would be unhappy with Jimmy and Terry. But if it's not broken, why fix it?

Follow the passion

That's within you

Living the truth

Will set you free

—"Velvet Rope"

Maybe you have hidden this pain. Maybe you're wondering what it would be like to make us think you're reading *The Story of O* and your man is



SCHOTT-CALLERS: clockwise from top right Twista of Cw/Atlantic Records, Kenny Burns of 2620/Freeworld, Brand Nubian's DJ Alamo (MC), Derrick "D-Dot" Angelettie of Mystery Systems/A&R Bad Boy Entertainment, Kainon Jasper of Shotcallers/Czar Records, Bryce Wilson of Shotcallers/Czar Records and not shown Paris Davis A&R Atlantic Records.

THE BETA



Photo by Collette Forrester, Photo by J. M. V.C.

PHAT TRAK CONTEST

Alizé, Atlantic Records, and VIBE Magazine Search for "the Ultimate Dance Trak of '98". Grand Prize Includes a Trip to NYC, Studio Time, and A Chance at a Demo Band Funded By Atlantic Records. *Alizé Phat Trak Contest is*

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OFFICIAL RULES. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. To enter must be 21 or older who, as of the date of entry and as of the date of the final show-down, are not then signed to, or in negotiations with, an exclusive recording agreement with any record label. Submit a five minute danceable track that mentions Alizé on cassette. Mail to: Alizé Phat Trak Contest, c/o VIBE magazine, 215 Lexington Ave., 8th Floor, New York, NY 10016. Entries must be received by January 30, 1999. Atlantic Records, VIBE and Atlantic Records are not responsible for late, damaged, or misdirected entries. One (1) Grand Prize Winner will win maximum of three round-trip tickets to New York, hotel accommodations for three (3) nights, studio recording time totaling 24 hours at 4/29/98, 4/29/98 and 4/30/98. We cannot assure any alternative dates (approx. value \$400). Four (4) finalists will be selected on or about March 1, 1999. The four (4) finalists entries will be the track that is determined by the judges and demonstrate the greatest skill, creativity and talent in track composition based on their professional judgment, judgement and experience as described above. The decision of their judgement will be final. Winner agrees to participate in good faith exclusively with Atlantic Records, or Atlantic Records request, for three (3) months after the contest regarding an agreement for the winner's exclusive recording services. There is no limit to the number of entries that will be considered, however only one entry is permitted per person and entries must meet all other eligibility requirements. The greater the number of entries the lesser are ones chance of winning this competition. Winners will be notified by mail or phone by March 10, 1999. Cash will not be awarded in lieu of prize won. Contest is open to all U.S. residents, 21 or older except employees and their families of Atlantic Records, VIBE and Atlantic Records, their affiliates, subsidiaries, suppliers and advertising agencies. Void where prohibited or restricted by law. All federal, state and local restrictions apply. Taxes are the sole responsibility of prize winner. Winner may be used to execute an affidavit of eligibility publicly release and to travel liability within ten days of notification. Within the time of the winner, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to VIBE magazine, 215 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016 by March 15, 1999. Do not include request for winner's list with entry cassette.



Alizé, Atlantic Records & VIBE Magazine. Photo by J. M. V.C.

it's all about spankings and nipple clips and surrender. Like, wouldn't it be fun all of a sudden to relinquish your feigned tranquility and beg for the pain you trust your lover not to give you too much of.

Then you redo Rod Stewart's 1976 "Tonight's the Night (Gonna Be Alright)" because that song was massive when you were, like, 11, and you sing it with all the "girl" references intact so it seems to your public that you're into girls. And if some factions of your public are girls into girls or boys into girls who are into girls—then they know you support that. Maybe this sticky marketing convolution is from whence your new art comes. Maybe, in this day, it's from where all art comes.

Or maybe Janet Jackson really feels lonely. Because she sounds more convincing, more alive, on "I Get Lonely" than on *The Velvet Rope*'s bland-as-tile song, better than when she's singing about any of that tie-me-up-tie-me-down, gettin'-freaked-from-behind "rope burn" stuff. Janet's "velvet room" is the ho-hum part of *The Velvet Room*. She says herself she wants to feel a "soft" rope burn. Whatever. When it's down to ropes, feel the heat or get out the kitchen.

When was the last time you had a big laugh?

When I get tired, I get so giddy I start crying. I laugh so hard, I can't breathe; and then that becomes funny to me. Just last month, René was pretending to be an actor in a film, he had a cigar in his mouth. It was so funny, I couldn't stop. On top of it, we had wine. Wine makes me giddy too. Just a couple of cups of sips and—

You're gone?

I'm a lightweight is what they tell me. When I take a couple of sips—you know how it normally goes to someone's head? With me, it goes in the opposite direction.

[Laughs] So it's on after that?

I'm telling you. Literally, it takes two sips and, oh my God!

You're looking for René?

Somebody! I'm just joking. I'm curious where sex fits into your life now.

Are you kidding?

Do tell.

[Laughs] Please, could I not? So is sex about bondage and domination for you now? Are you and your lover playing fun games with power?

[Laughs] You mean, like pain? Are we into pain?

Yes, are you into pain, Miss Jackson?

No, no...but I'm told I have a high tolerance for pain.

How would you know?

From the things I've gotten pierced, I suppose—my nipple, my tongue.

Okay, then. In some of your photos you look strong and in control, but there's one picture of

you where your wrists are up. I'm wondering how you got to that place.

It's a part of me. On this album, you hear that. For instance, about [the song] "Rope Burn," someone said, "You know, that's a painful thing." But it says "soft rope burn"—nothing to really harm a person. I'm getting deeper into my fantasies, into what I like and don't like—that's the other side of this album. It all goes back to feeling special. There's a song on the album called "Anything." It's about pleasing a man. There are people who are into pleasing others, and people who are into being pleased. Some nights you feel one way; some nights you feel another. Pleasing someone else and seeing them enjoy—you become aroused.

What's your idea of ecstasy? Is it the old candles and flowers?

It's all that. There's a point where you could go too far...I'm not into that real painful stuff.

The idea of a velvet rope to me is, like, you're constrained, but nicely.

Exactly. It's soft. Instead of it being crass, there's still something classy about it. The candles, the flowers, the wax, the ice...

The whole nine?

Yeah. Trying new things.

How did you come to name the album The Velvet Rope?

That's what I've been exposed to all my life. That's what I still see every single day in my life.

Which is what? Pain blanketed with a nice little covering?

That need to feel special. There are two sides to the velvet rope: those who want to be on the other side and those who are on the other side.

It depends where you're standing.

Take a nightclub: those outside of the club, waiting to be chosen—they wish they were inside. Once inside, they think they're the shit. But there's another velvet rope—the V.I.P. section. They were in that section, but they can't be.

Does anyone get to that point where they're finally on the right side of the velvet rope?

Where the grass is greener?

I guess you never get it?

I don't know. We're all born special, and somewhere along the way, we lose knowing that. We want that specialness. When you feel special, you don't need a rope to validate you. You know who you are.

You're always on the right side if you have no one else.

That's where I'd like to be.

Sitin' her with my tears

All alone with my fears

—"I Get Lonely"

"Get Lonely" is a gigantic voicey song that takes you right up into the spirit of Dru Hill's recent Jermaine Dupri-remixed "In My Bed." The song starts with the beautifully overblown chorus—"I get so lonely / Can't let / Just anybody hold me / You are the one / Who lives in me my dear / Want no one but you." After that, it's official: you're singing it until next year. There're, like, 40 Janets singing the chorus, and she harmonizes with herself like she's the Pips. Honey butter. This is where she wins. Makes pop. Art. Hits you where? In the head the heart the booty.

So why do some people dis Janet? Is it that when a person gets so large at a certain point—they can no longer be trusted? Does art get treit automatically?

There are no questions about who Janet is when she's making music like this (or 1989's "Escapade" or 1989's "Miss You Much" or a longlist of others). Janet Jackson is not just Michael's sister—because so is LaToya. And Rebbie. Janet is Janet is Janet. And maybe when you get that huge—so big that you've got to look for you in your own life—nothing is regular anymore.

Can you imagine a day when you put out a record and people aren't interested?

It can very well happen with this record. The applause will die, it happens to every single person in this business. It's like in my song "You." Does what they think determine your worth? By getting this applause, are you worthy? Without the applause, are you worthless? And that's what a lot of artists have trouble with. Maybe their music is not what it used to be. Maybe people aren't paying as much attention to them as they did in the past. But those things happen, and you have to understand that you're special and it's okay. I'd rather for people not to know what I am, what I have, or who I am, and to accept me for me.

Do you ever have that option?

Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. Have you gone through things with friends, where you realized they were just being your friend because you were Janet Jackson?

Hell yeah! Or just being my friend because I lived right down the hall from my brother Michael when I was younger.

How do you know when somebody's really your friend?

I think the truth comes out; you can't fake it forever.

Is there any place you can walk the streets and not have no one points at you?

[Laughs] So far it hasn't happened. So I don't know if there is.

I'm just curious because—

Would I like it?

Would you?

I can't have my cake and eat it too. ☑

JANET DAMITA JO JACKSON

What she's done for us lately

Born: May 16, 1966, Gary, Indiana

THE UNTIL-NEEN

- Good Times, 1977–1979. She's Penny, an abused orphan
- A New Kind of Family, 1979. She's JoJo, the daughter of a divorcée (Telma Hopkins)
- Diff'rent Strokes, 1981–1982. She's Charlene, Willie's (Todd Bridges) girlfriend
- Fame, 1984–1986. She's Cleo, a singing/dancing high school student

THE BOW SCREEN

- Poetic Justice, 1993. She's Justice

ON THE ROAD

- Rhythm Nation Tour, 1990. The biggest debut tour in history

THE ALBUMS

- Janet Jackson, 1982
- Dream Street, 1984
- Control, 1986: five million units sold
- Rhythm Nation 1814, 1989: six million units
- Janet, 1993: six million units
- Design of a Decade (1982/1996, 1995): two million units

NO...IT'S DAMITA JO

- "Escapade," 1989
- "Miss You Much," 1989
- "Black Cat," 1989
- "Love Will Never Do (Without You)," 1989
- "That's the Way Love Goes," 1993

AND THE WINNER IS

- Eight American Music Awards
- Two Grammy Awards
- Seven MTV Video Music Awards
- Five Soul Train Music Awards



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HEIGHT	10.5 IN.	HEIGHT	10.5 IN.

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making sense

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His name is Common. His music is anything but. Scoop Jackson chills with Chi-Town's rarest MC. Photographs by Christian Lantry

I'm here to say thank you, son / You've been a teacher for me / When I was supposed to be a teacher for you.

These heartfelt words, uttered by Lonnie Lynn on "Pop z/Rap 2/Fatherhood," the footnote on his son Common's album, express sentiments rarely audible in hip hop. It's an exceptional moment—a ghetto bastard getting love from the man who made him one. Getting love from the man who planted a seed and left its nurturing to someone else.

Now, some 20-odd years later, Lonnie Rashid Lynn, a.k.a. the extraordinary Common, is experiencing his own fatherhood drama. Two days after his daughter is born, a gas leak in his house on the South Side of Chicago prevents him from bringing the infant home from the hospital. Panic doesn't set in, but folks are stressed. "My heart was beating hard," he tells me later, shaking his head.

Common had to scramble across Chicago, family in tow, trying to find a safe haven for baby girl to breathe in; he was dealing with a whole 'nother side of "keepin' it real." A VIBE photo shoot and interview, meant to coincide with the release of his third effort, *One Day It'll All Make Sense*, are put on indefinite hold. "I gotta take care of real business first," the 25-year-old dad says.

Three hours later, the fam is straight, and Chicago's most abstract MC grabs a Heineken and exhales. "Do you know this album was finished on the exact same day my daughter was born?" Common asks, as we unwind in the North Shore apartment of his manager, Derek Dudley. The crib sits right at the curb of Lake Michigan. "I feel like I had two kids on that day. To have them both at the same time was God just letting me know something. I mean, the spirituality, the significance, the connection."

Amid the crush of so-called alternative hip hoppers like the Fugees, A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, and the Roots, Common stands alone, his lyric virtuosity bringing a midwestern depth to all of rap music. Full of songs like "G.O.D. (Gaining One's Definition)," "My City," the "Stolen Moments" trilogy, and the celebratory single "Reminding Me (of Set)," *One Day* is blessedly intimate—and rooted in pure skill. It's also deliciously musical, with masterful tracks by Common's longtime collaborator, No I.D., and memorable guest vocals courtesy of Q-Tip, the Roots' Black Thought, Lauryn Hill, Goodie Mob's majestic Cec-Lo, and a whis-

perry Erykah Badu.

Since delivering 1994's contemplative *Resurrection*, the splendid follow-up to his overlooked 1992 debut, *Can I Borrow a Dollar?*, Common has dropped spectacular gems via scene-stealing guest verses. Judging from De La Soul's 1996 "The Bizness," the Roots' 1996 "UNiverse at War," and projects with his labelmate DJ Honda, it appears that Common and his beloved H.E.R. (which stands for "Hip Hop and its Essence are Real") are still strolling hand in hand—no matter what Ice Cube may have to say.

"That's squashed now," Common says of his rift with Cube, which started when the Cali rhymers took offense at a verse in Com's 1994 "I Used to Love H.E.R.": "On some dumb shit when she comes to the city / Talkin' 'bout poppin' glocks, servin' rocks, or hittin' switches / Now she's a gangsta rollin' with gangsta bitches." Cube responded in Westside Connection's 1995 "Westside Slaughterhouse"; then Com struck back with the incendiary "The Bitch in Yoo" (1996).

"He and I settled that beef when Farrakhan brought all of us together [in Chicago] after Biggie and Tupac died," says Com. "Here you have a room full of black men, and me and Cube were the only artists in there that had a person-to-person beef. As soon as Ice walked in, he saw me and said, 'Let's squash this beef, brother.' The feeling was so emotional, you could feel brothers were about to cry. We just hugged each other."

The photo shoot is over, and Dudley's chic apartment looks completely trashed.

Playing in the background is "Retrospect for Life," Common's haunting duet with Lauryn Hill (the pair mix it up on the subject of abortion). "Listen to this!" Dudley says. "After this, nobody will ever need to do a song about the subject again." Common confirms that Lauryn was pregnant when they recorded the song. "That's what makes it so deep," he says. "It was also around the same time I found out about my seed."

An MC's worth is measured by how much he or she Moves the Crowd, but Common is moving mental mountains. Like his Pops said, Lonnie Rashid Lynn is someone who teaches while he's being taught, which is an important, honorable component in raising children. "This album is like the birth of a child. That's how much work we put into it," Com says. "Of course, my daughter is more important because that's the flesh. But this album is my soul." ☐





CLIP

PIZZICATO FIVE

Space-age sonics

Yasuharu Konishi, Maki Nomiya

Standing on the tiny, darkened stage of Mother, a smoky New York City nightclub, the eclectic, electric Pizzicato Five are amusing themselves to tears—without cracking a smile. The irony of two Tokyo natives absorbed in sonic kitsch, American style, is not lost on singer Maki Nomiya and DJ Yasuharu Konishi. Nomiya, who looks like a vampy, Japanese Tina Turner, weaves together cheeky lyrics in her native tongue. Konishi provides the musical backdrop, cutting 'n' pasting slick '60s soundtracks, Burt Bacharach-type arrangements, and bossa nova beats.

The following afternoon, Konishi, dressed in a sleek suit, reflects on the group's third U.S. release, *Happy End of the World*, while he waits for Nomiya to join him in the SoHo Grand Hotel's Grand Bar. "Like the music, the title is meant to be playful," he says through a hovering interpreter, sipping a glass of cold water. "I feel that people take music too seriously, while we view it as fun. If it hadn't been for the Monkees, I'm sure my music would have had a darker edge."

Resonant with the pop manifesto of Andy Warhol—their wacky, the-mundane-is-dazzling spiritual godfather—Pizzicato Five's bizarre, space-age loungecore predates the current fascination with dry martinis, cigars, sharkskin suits, and *Swingers*. "Before *Rolling Stone*, no one thought pop was a bad thing," sneers Konishi, who has released 14

albums in his native Tokyo (P5's two previous American discs, 1994's *Made in USA* and 1995's *The Sound of Music by Pizzicato Five*, were compilations of highlights from those records). And this particular brand of kaleidoscopic music isn't easy to create. "I don't like to separate the music I make on turntables from that which is composed on instruments. Our music narrows the gap between creating songs and deejaying."

Although Konishi hopes one day to collaborate with the Spice Girls, Pizzicato Five draw their inspiration from the electro hip hop popularized by '80s sensations Afrika Bambaataa and Mantronix. "In Japan, black music is having an overwhelming effect," he says. "Kids are darkening their skin and making their hair kinky. With Pizzicato Five, I want to unite with blacks and Asians to create a new Sly & the Family Stone." And, once again, he refuses to smile.

Michael A. Gonzales

Sun Aug 3
Fri. Aug. 8
Fri. Aug. 15
Fri. Aug. 22

REGU

Sun. Aug. 31
Sun. Sept. 7
Mon. Sept. 14
Sun. Sept. 21
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Sun. Nov. 2
Sun. Nov. 9
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With his grit, wit, and wild-child vocals, Busta Rhymes is hip hop's cameo king. Will he be the next pop prince? *Gabriel Alvarez* sneaks up on the mouth that roared.

Photographs by Eve M. Fowler

Ay, yo, what's up?!" bellows Busta Rhymes, his forehead crunching into a frown. He's using his vocal machete to alert a throng of image whittlers that something is very wrong. "Why," he wants to know, "are they lowering my shit?"

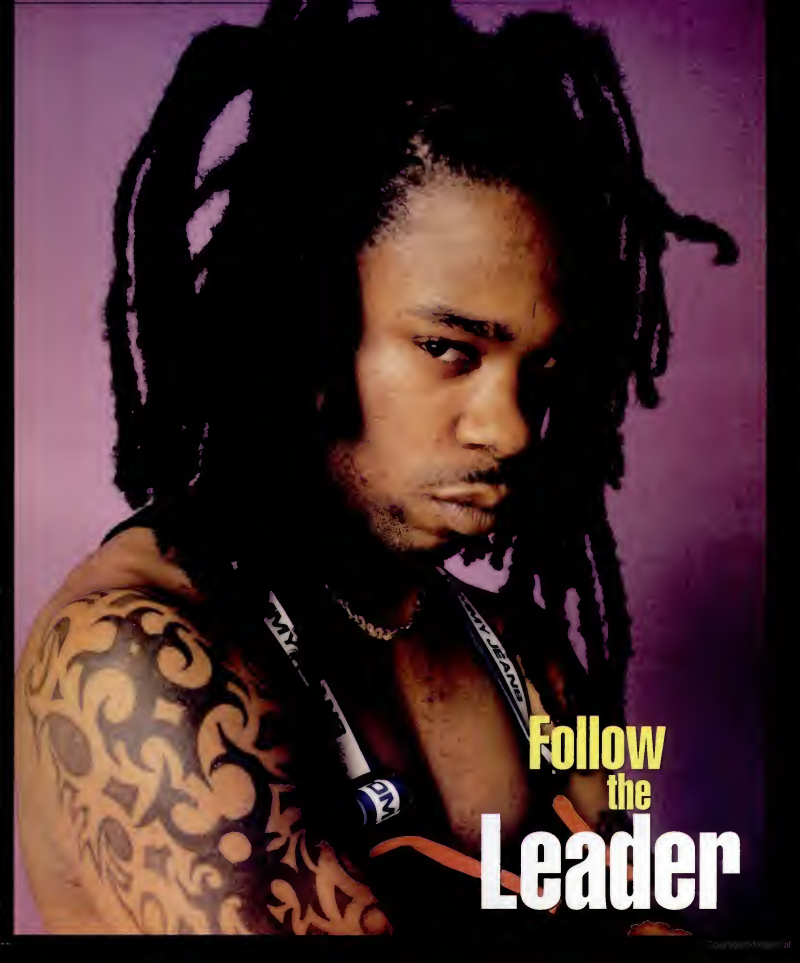
Some numbskull has fiddled with the volume knob on the deluxe stereo blasting Busta's new album, *When Disaster Strikes*. He freezes, then immediately howls. His signature roar flies up above the din, bouncing off the corners of the immaculate, sun-drenched studio space near Manhattan's Chelsea Piers. The sound returns to its original level, louder even, within milliseconds.

Busta Rhymes is not only the E.F. Hutton of the rap game, he's among the leaders—along with artists like Puff Daddy and the Fugees—of pop hip hop's new school. But you couldn't guess it from his down-home, block-rocking, stop-what-you're-doing "Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Could See," the first single from *Disaster*. Produced by Shamello and Buddha for Prophecy Productions and coproduced by a new jack called Epitome, the song features Busta's erratic, rat-a-tat-word-play over a primal drumbeat straight outta the Congo. No recycled loop, no guest vocalist, no obvious reach for radio acceptance—and it still hits the boogie nerve. At a recent Boyz II Men record release soiree, DJ Kid Capri spun "Put Your Hands" six times in a row, and every time it started over, the jaded, faded industry crowd roared as loudly as Busta does.

"I'm a superstar," says Busta, hunched over in a metallic chair, a grin spreading across his face. Ruthy, his stylist, twists Busta's hair into wild ropes. His locked 'do dangles in front of his grill. "You know what I'm sayin'? I'm a supasupadupa star. And I say that because I like to entertain instead of just makin' records." Busta Rhymes, 25, is indeed a package. It ain't just rhymes on a beat. He's a concept: lyrics, attitude, performance. "It's about becoming one with the music," he says.

It's also about expanding the boundaries of what's acceptable on the mike. Like Jimi Hendrix on guitar, Busta deconstructs and innovates, using every grunt, roar, and gasp to create an adventure in etymology. The combined effect of his garish Cat in the Hat headwear, outlandish apparel, and exaggerated movements is akin to seeing the Tasmanian Devil on acid. "Sometimes I hear shit in a beat that ain't even there," Busta says. "I put my rhythm inside the rhyme flow and make it feel like a sample." Even back in his days with Leaders of the New School, Busta stood out like a red apple in a bushel of green ones. He was ripe ahead of his crew. No disrespect; it's just true.

A clear testament to Busta's skills is that he can make his presence felt without even rhyming on a song. When A Tribe Called Quest snatched Busta's "Oh my my God!" for their brilliant "God Lives Through," it was just the right touch, the final stroke on a masterpiece. And as hype-man? Forget about it. Busta laced his *primo* and Flipmode brethren Rampage the Last Boy Scout with the blazing hook for his recent "Wild for da Night"—singularly making Ram's career and ensuring himself a good seat at every family reunion. "He's unique; he's a genius; he's a master at his craft," Rampage gushes



Follow
the
Leader

about his older cousin.

Busta's solo debut, 1996's *The Coming*, brought him much respect from hip hop's hardcore; but wasn't until MTV blessed him with heavy rotation for his MTV Award-nominated "Woo-Hah!! Got You All in Check" video that Busta was exposed to a mainstream audience. He says, however, he wasn't looking for mass acceptance. "I don't change—as far as my creative edge," he says. "It's because of that creative edge I was able to bring about appeal on such a universal level."

And when biters like Onyx chomped on his gritty vocal style, Busta batted back. He got grimmer, flying over the cuckoo's nest on Craig Mack's 1994 star-studded "Flava in Ya Ear" (Remix) before settling for the hardcore-like *Quick-Draw-McGraw* style he favored on *The Coming*.

Now, with the pull of a cow-levering twister, *Disaster* storms in. Loaded with enough energy to power the S.S. *Minnow* back to civilization, *Disaster* features Busta controlling bursts of breath like a dusted drill sergeant who ain't waiting to exhale. He gets by with a little help from friends like Sean "Puffy" Combs and the Bad Boy crew in "Body Rock" and the divine Erykah Badu for the filthy "One." Busta lists and loops the organ from Al Green's thumping "Love and Happiness" (1972) for the flippant "Turn It Up" before walling the praises of sensi on the anthem "Get High Tonight." Overall, the forecast looks lovely for Busta. Someone call Tracey Lee—now it's party time.

"You know how a car gets prettier when you put new rims on it—tinted windows, carper; the interior is more decked out," says Busta, switching from one set of gear to another. "Each thing you add to that car to make it better is like a new style that I add to my flow."

It was a dark night, pitch black. May 20... approximately 11:30 p.m. A black child was born.
—"Introduction," *The Coming*

East Flatbush, Brooklyn. A shortly named Trevor Smith Jr. is fending for candy bars and video games ("Robotron 2084 was my shit," says Busta) and trying to escape the strict surveillance of his West Indian, Seventh-Day Adventist mother and father. It was Busta, his brother, and his parents. "A Christian household," Busta says in a soft tone. "We had a Jamaican upbringing—real disciplined, major supervision."

"I wanted to go to the clubs at night because that's where the hip hop was really circulating." But my moms and pops wasn't really with the run-out-in-the-streets shit. "And for good reason: Brooklyn, like so many urban areas, was wild. 'I had a best friend in '81 who got killed for a bike,'" says Busta. Concerned about her family's safety, Busta's mom instigated a move to Uniondale, Long Island in 1983. "I wasn't feelin' 'that at all," he says. "Going to school with white kids. Big land, space, dogs—*Little House on the Prairie*—type shit."

"I thought everybody in Long Island was

"I TOLD MY MOM THE FIRST TIME I REALIZED I HAD SPERM," SAYS BUSTA. "I BUSTED ON MYSELF, RAN OUT, AND TOLD HER. WORD UP. SHE LAUGHED AT ME. THEN SHE TOLD ME WHAT TIME IT WAS."

pushy," he says. "I'm comin' from Brooklyn, and I'm thinking, 'I'm gonna show all these heads what real-life niggas is all about. But then I went to school and found a whole bunch of other kids from the 'hood whose parents wanted to get their families out of the ghettos so they could have better lives.' In addition to his cousin Milo, Busta started hangin' around this kid from Queens and another ex-Brooklynite—later to be known as Charlie Brown and Dinco D. This was 1986. Trevor became Busta Rhymes, and the nucleus of the Leaders of the New School was formed."

But in addition to creating one of the best MC crews of the mid-1980s, Busta was busy doing what teenagers have a tendency to do: having sex. He lost his virginity at 15, to an older girl. "The first time I had sex, I didn't know what to do," he says, smiling. "She put it in for me and asked me what I was gonna do." But Busta at least had a clue, thanks to his mother, who had schooled him on the birds and bees a few years prior.

"My moms, we're kinda like best friends before anybody," he says proudly. "I told her the first time I realized I had sperm. It was New Year's Eve and my moms wasn't tryin' to let me go nowhere. I was thirteen. I had went and got some Jamaican white rum; chased my shit with some milk. After two of those, I was all wild horny lookin' at a porno tape. And that was it. Bust on myself. I ran out and told my mother, Mom! Mom! Word up. My mother laughed at me and told me to clean up. And then she really told me what time it was with the whole 'fuck' thing." His face warms at the memory. "She was doin' her part as a mother," he smiles, "—communicating with her baby."

Busta's rebellious nature finally found a more music-oriented outlet in 1989, when Leaders of the New School signed to Elektra, with the help of the Bomb Squad's Hank Shocklee and Eric "Viemann" Sadler. After his first upbringing, the 17-year-old Busta bused loose. "I couldn't fuck with the 'Kids oughta be seen and not heard unless spoken to' concept," he says. "I felt I had so much to express."

Busta's trademark "narrrhh, narrrhhhh" dungeon-dragon growl (first heard in "Case of the P.T.A." from the L.O.N.S.'s 1993 debut album, *Future Without a Past*) was born of his love for medieval-fantasy flicks. "That whole dragon concept was the shit to me!" he exclaims. "Even from karate flicks—Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon*! The dragon always seemed like something powerful. I wanted to blow smoke out of my mouth, so I got interested in smoking weed just to get that effect. And then I learned to inhale."

Equally intoxicating was Busta's appearance on A Tribe Called Quest's classic hip hop posse, "Scenario," in 1991. The indelible song marked the end of an era for Busta, both personally and professionally. An upstart MC from Harlem named Hood appeared on the remix for "Scenario," only to be murdered before the song's release. Good friend Subroc, from KMD, also returned to the essence around this time. Tragedy struck again in 1992, when the pregnant mother of Busta's child went into premature labor in New York City while the Leaders were touring in St. Martin.

"When I got back, he had already passed away," whispers Busta to the son he lost. Busta, waiting for the next photo setup, looks morose; his eyes are cold. "It was just a bad experience," he says. "I was so fucked up behind it for a minute because [my girl] didn't went through that on her own, you know what I'm sayin' I had to deal with that stress for a long time."

Careerwise, things got even more stressful. The Leaders' sophomore album, 1993's *T.L.M.E. The Inner*

Mind's Eye, *The Endless Dispute With Reality*, had a longer title than shelf life. The much-too-complex project was overshadowed by stellar efforts like KRS-One's *Return of the Boom Box*, Tribe's classic *Midnight Marauders*, and Wu-Tang Clan's *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*. The group went their separate ways soon after. "Right now, everybody—Dinco, Milo, and Charlie Brown—got individual agendas that they're tryin' to capitalize on," says Busta of the wayward Leaders legion. "But if the Leaders of the New School is destined to be the next power move in the near future, then that's what's gonna happen."

The newly solo MC lay low for a while after the split, but a quiet Busta Rhymes is like an honest politician—you don't come across one very often. He began his comeback campaign guest spotting on one hit record after another, from a rambling outburst on Mary J. Blige's 1993 *What's the 411?* to Boyz II Men's 1995 "Vibin' (Remix)." He's done plenty more: a series of wicked verses on Fishbone's overlooked *Chin Chin's Badass Reunion* in 1996, "Hit 'Em High" (with Method Man, Coolio, L.L. Cool J., and B-Real) in 1996, and this spring's "Rumble in the Jungle," with Tribe and the Refugee All-Stars. Now, it's gotten to the point where a tag-team track seems empty without his gravelly antics. He's an MC's MC. Busta Rhymes brings the drama.

In another hour, the sun will be exiting stage left. Busta's expertly groomed locks get one last tug. He stands tall—a full six feet. From a distance he appears lanky, but up close, his tattooed biceps are taut and muscular. Etched in black on his left arm are the names of his sons—four-year-old T'Ziah and the late Tahiem II—encircled by elaborate markings that represent truth, strength, and wealth. "Everything I have is this," says Busta in reference to his young son. "I'ma enjoy life for me, but I'm livin' for my son."

In front of the cameras, Busta exudes an inexplicable energy—one that allows him to upstage a live, two-ton elephant in the Hype Williams-directed video for "Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Could See."

A few flicks into the shoot, Busta inquires about the getup he's wearing. He's sporting a particularly dapper polar-lense jumpsuit that he's taken a liking to and wants to keep. The stylist apologizes but says the clothing company—one that Busta has often patronized—insists that it be returned. Busta stops the session. Sauntering over to a nearby chair, he proclaims loudly, voice rising through the air like a chainsaw: "Forget gettin' it! Busta steps out of the gear and changes into an animal print."

Busta knows he's blessed. He also knows his own power. He even leans up on the idea that he's courtin' mass appeal. "I'm gonna make records that I know are gonna get me money, more so than just making records for props," Busta says. "Even though I value hip hop music and the culture on the same level, I value my life and the life of my family first."

So, how does he see his future in relation to his past? "My attitude hasn't really changed. The love I had for rhyming now is the same love I had for it in the beginning," he says. "I think at the age of forty-five, I'll want to make songs. I'll be a disgustingly filthy asshole cat, watching my children as adults, with my grandchildren runnin' around and shit." And what will the second and third generation of the Busta Rhymes clan be up to? "Dancin' to the songs I put out at that time. Puttin' out stuff people feel is the hot shit." He smiles. "Just like I am right now." □





GOD CITY

Tucked away in the Ozark Mountains is a 400-acre, whites-only compound called Elohim City.

Founded 26 years ago by the Reverend Robert Millar, Elohim City has attracted a who's who of criminals, skinheads, and heavily armed racists for prayer meetings and paramilitary drills. Even Timothy McVeigh was in touch, just days before he blew up Oklahoma City's federal building. Yet federal authorities are reluctant to raid or even discuss the strange cast of characters at Oklahoma's Aryan bed-and-breakfast. *Jonathan Franklin* reports

.....

We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there.... Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell.... The earth seemed unearthly and the men—no, they were not inhuman. You know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman.

—*Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad

My beat-up rental rattled up a steep, uneven dirt road. The occasional county store or farmstead dotted my way, but as I climbed I saw fewer and fewer signs of civilization. There were high-voltage power lines crossing the hillside and a dead armadillo or two.

I remembered a pair of warnings.

"They are likely to meet you with a gun. Stay in your car and let them approach you," Adair County Sheriff Charles Hartshorne had told me.

"Not only are there twenty or thirty adults out there armed, but you've got fifty kids running around with guns," said a federal agent who asked not to be identified. "They go on survival training. Those kids out there are just as dangerous—or more dangerous—than the adults. They're not afraid of anything."

I drove past abandoned refrigerators, the mangled corpse of a motorcycle, and meager yard sales where bleached cow skulls were sold for \$10. Keeping an eye out for white teenagers locked and loaded, I approached a fence with Frisbee-size turtles impaled one after another on stakes. A warning? Country art? I began to roll down my window to snap photographs when I realized that they weren't turtles. They were heads. Big, sun-baked, leathery-eyed catfish heads. Fence posts protruded from each mouth like petrified tongues. I laughed off my paranoia, grabbed a head, and jammed it onto my car antenna.

I had reached the outskirts of Elohim City [pronounced *el-oh-HEEM*], a rustic religious encampment and known gathering spot for antigovernment guerrillas. Nestled on a wooded hillside in the Ozark Mountains, Elohim City is a place where Oklahoma,

Arkansas, and visions of Armageddon merge to form a 400-acre, whites-only commune.

The purpose of my journey was unclear even to me. I knew that in recent years' gallery of Elohim City "guests" had been involved in bombings, bank robberies, and racially motivated murders. But in recent months, the remote compound had been linked—largely by so-called conspiracy theorists—to the Oklahoma City bombing of April 19, 1995. I had enough curiosity to justify a trip to Oklahoma, but I wasn't sure how these racial separatists would receive a reporter from a "mixed race" magazine such as VIBE.

Figuring out who planned the explosion that killed 168 innocents and shattered the sense of security that once enveloped America's heartland has become my generation's version of "Who Killed Kennedy?" Conspiracy theories sprouted like mushrooms from the rubble of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building—as if the fertilizer that fueled the bomb itself were fomenting mutant ideas. Between gun shows and the Internet, I'd heard every story: the Iraqis did it; the Irish Republican Army helped them out; the Branch Davidians finally got their revenge for the Waco inferno. During my interview with Timothy McVeigh, in Colorado's El Reno Federal Correctional Institution in February 1996, I found him so tight-lipped about the bombing, I wondered if anyone would ever know the full truth.

I left the fish heads, crested a ridge, and spotted a polyurethane-domed hall that looked like a giant mushroom. This was Elohim City's Worship House—the center of town. I'd read reports of pistol-toting, black-booted guards and the country air crackling with gunfire. All I saw were a barefoot father and son playing between trailers and homemade wooden houses that looked like they'd been designed by an architect on acid.

I honked the horn and cautiously stepped out of my car. The place looked deserted, but I remembered that an FBI informant had reported the existence of

a system of underground bunkers. The young father greeted me and introduced himself as David Millar, son of Elohim City's founder, the Reverend Robert Millar. David was unarmed, pleasant, and patient enough to chat with someone whom he considered another misinformed reporter. "It's kind of slow around here," he said. "Everyone is away. It's not that I am hiding anything from you."

I asked him straight off if he believed the accusations of Carol Howe, a former informant for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), that, principally, the Oklahoma City bombing had emanated from this community. "She was the one encouraging illegal activity. She's a bit—" Millar shook his head sideways to suggest that he found her loopy. "We've been accused of being a nudist colony, of being drug dealers and terrorists," he said. "We just think there's a better way to live than working for thirty years to pay off a mortgage. We want to be more self-sufficient."

Millar confirmed that the structure behind him was the Worship House, but he was unwilling to let me enter. Other reporters who'd observed the daily two-hour ceremony wrote of armed guards at every door, pistols bouncing to the beat of bluegrass. Millar dismissed the importance of firearms, denying the wild stories he'd read about his own community. He suggested I track down his father. "He knows about all of this—if he will talk to you."

In early April 1995, as he prepared to bomb the Murrah building, the Gulf War veteran Tim McVeigh holed up at the Imperial Motel in Kingman, Arizona for 12 days. On April 5, he called Ryder Truck rental to reserve the delivery vehicle and, according to the index of his telephone calling card, called Elohim City less than a minute later.

Reverend Millar's daughter-in-law Joan Millar, who took the call, said that McVeigh was hoping to meet with Elohim City's security director, a tall, blue-eyed, 37-year-old German ex-soldier named

Illustration by Edmund Guy

Andreas Strassmeir—a shady character known to Elohim City residents as Andy the German.

Strassmeir is no ordinary German. His father, Guenter, has been called “the architect of German reunification” for his role as Secretary of State for West Germany. After McVeigh was arrested for the bombing, Andreas Strassmeir left Elohim City for Berlin.

Strassmeir has been named in a civil lawsuit filed last year by Glenn and Kathy Wilburn, an Oklahoma couple who

that the ATF and FBI had prior knowledge of a bombing plot.

Last December, Strassmeir gave his own remarkably detailed account of the bombing plot to a reporter from London’s *Sunday Telegraph*.

“What happens if [the OKC bombing] was a sting operation from the very beginning?” Strassmeir asked the reporter. “The relatives of the victims are going to go crazy, and the [government’s] informant is going to be held responsible for the deaths of 168 people? Of course,

when the bomb was being built.”

“We are all under a gag order,” said a spokesperson for the Justice Department, who was not at liberty to comment on theories that Strassmeir or anyone else at Elohim City had anything to do with the bombing until the trial of McVeigh’s alleged accomplice, Terry Nichols, was over. The Justice Department did provide a familiar denial: “The government has no other information that people other than Nichols and McVeigh masterminded the bombing.”

equinox, and the days start at high noon. “If you come to Elohim City,” Millar says, “you’re on Elohim City time.”

Millar’s religion, called Christian Identity, teaches that Anglo-Saxons and Celts are God’s true chosen people. Not unlike the Five Percent Nation’s notion of “white devils,” Christian Identity doctrine holds that nonwhite humans are descendants from the “seed of Satan.” Founded by Edward Hine in 1871, Christian Identity has become an organizing force that, in the words of the Anti-Defamation League, has become “the glue that binds together” tens of thousands of diverse racists. “The track record of violence coming out of Christian Identity is very strong,” says Mike Reynolds, senior intelligence analyst at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in Montgomery, Alabama. “It is the foundation for the American jihad [religious warrior]. It’s not just a handful of people. But even if it were, it’s not the quantity that matters; it’s the intensity. A thousand hardcore, underground members bound by a religious zealotry that focuses on government and law enforcement as ‘the Enemy’ can do extraordinary damage.”

For 26 years, Elohim City—officially a nonprofit church that raised crops and livestock—existed on the fringes of a loosely organized armed movement training for a race war. Not content with defensive maneuvers, the most hardened militiamen were determined to jumpstart a white men’s revolution. They had to act fast; U.S. Census figures indicated that by 2010, America would have no racial majority.

According to FBI documents, Elohim City was under surveillance before the Oklahoma bombing. The ATF suspected that Elohim City had more fortification than a religious farming community would seem to require. One FBI report stated that “Strassmeir is alleged to train platoon-size groups consisting of thirty to forty individuals approximately every three months at the Elohim City facility.”

Despite an apparent abundance of incriminating evidence, Elohim City has never been raided. Law enforcement’s passive approach seems like a blatant double standard to some. “I can’t fathom the Clipse or Bloods being left alone by the federal government to sit still and amass weapons,” says Sanyika Shukur, author of *Minister: An Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member*. “Imagine if a gang could have a stronghold like Elohim City. Who knows what they’d become?”

On one occasion in the mid-1980s, local law-enforcement officers tried to serve child-custody papers to an Elohim City resident, but they were met by an armed posse and backed down. Since then, a pair of bungled arrest attempts—in ‘92, against white supremacist Randy Weaver at Ruby Ridge, Idaho and in ‘93,



NATION BETWEEN THE SOUTHWEST TIMES RECORD

“Even a handful of people bound by a religious zealotry that focuses on government and law enforcement as ‘the Enemy’ can do extraordinary damage.”

lost two grandchildren on April 19. They believe federal authorities could have prevented the bombing and want to know why Strassmeir was not among the 33,000 people questioned in the wake of the blast. Vowing to “sue the U.S. government to break this wide open,” the Wilburns hope their lawsuit will confirm or kill rumors about whether Andy was an agent provocateur—not unlike other undercover operatives whom the FBI used to infiltrate and destabilize illegal or “anti-American” organizations, such as the Black Panther Party. Andy the German would surely also be of interest to a grand jury impaled last July by other families of bombing victims with the help of Republican state representative Charles Key. The stated purpose of this grand jury—dismissed by Oklahoma’s attorney general as “a wasteful witch hunt”—is to investigate allegations

the informant can’t come forward now; he’s scared stiff.”

After denying that he was the informant in question, Strassmeir went on to call McVeigh “a very undisciplined soldier” who had “made some changes in the plan.” Strassmeir said the bombing was supposed to happen at night, when no one would be killed. “That’s why,” he said, “the ATF had the building staked out from midnight to six a.m. After that, the ATF believed that the bombing was off for that day.” Federal authorities have denied repeated reports that the Oklahoma bomb squad was outside the building the morning of the explosion. But sometime that morning, Strassmeir claimed, McVeigh or one of his accomplices made a fatal decision in the parking lot. “In retrospect,” said the man who served as Elohim City’s director of security for four years, “the ATF should have made the bust

Elohim City has a population of approximately 100. They’re led by the Reverend Robert Millar, a 71-year-old Canadian minister with a long, documented history of providing aid and comfort to revolutionary white racists. At age 24, Millar envisioned the apocalypse: race wars, missiles rising from the ocean, and Toronto in flames. He says he was “directed” from his native Ontario to the Ozarks, where, in 1973, this son of a Mennonite preacher bought 400 acres and started a flock of his own. Millar called his community “God City,” using the Hebrew word for the Supreme Being, *Elohim*.

Millar has four sons at Elohim City and a few dozen grandchildren. Despite the citizenry’s preoccupation with racial purity, the blood lines in the community are difficult to track; the men are allowed more than one wife. The enclave’s celestial calendar begins at the spring



The Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, where 168 innocent civilians died

at Waco, Texas—have provoked such outrage that federal authorities have all but abandoned military-style assaults. Now, their preferred approaches are negotiation (as in recent standoffs with the Republic of Texas and the Freemen of Montana) and covert operations. Call it post-Waco trauma syndrome. “There have been plans,” said Sheriff Hartsorne, who has jurisdiction over Elohim City. “You hear about the federal marshals going in, but nothing happens.”

During the closing arguments at Timothy McVeigh’s trial, his court-appointed attorney, Stephen Jones, spoke of “a terrible secret” that concerned “matters known to the government.” After Jones’s client had been sentenced to death, the lawyer appeared on CBS’s *Meet the Press*. Citing facts that “the government knew from its informant at Elohim City,” he made his point even more strongly: “The government has not arrested all the conspirators responsible for the deaths of 168 people in Oklahoma City,” Jones

asserted. “There are at least four others. My client may be a soldier in an underground army, but he is not the general.”

With the revelation that McVeigh had telephoned Elohim City before the bombing, the search for this alleged general was on. Reporters hustled out to eastern Oklahoma, where they discovered that Elohim City residents were suspected of supporting the Ku Klux Klan Imperial Dragons, the Aryan Nations’ regional directors, the third in command at White Aryan Resistance, and a mishmash of wannabe revolutionaries, including the Aryan Republican Army (a gang of bank robbers who used Santa Claus disguises) and Cygnide (a punk rock band).

This was the place McVeigh chose to call two weeks before the blast. So what? He’d called 100 other right-wing looks, and, as a reporter, so had I. Federal investigators maintained that Elohim City was “not a matter of interest.” But if Elohim City was not involved, was it a coincidence that Michael Fortier—a man who scouted targets with McVeigh, who watched as McVeigh stacked soup cans on his kitchen table to illustrate details of the bomb, and who later cut a deal by testifying against McVeigh—was at the compound in the days around the explosion? Perhaps. Elohim City drew his kind like a magnet.

The phone call wasn’t McVeigh’s only link to the white-supremacist compound, according to Morris Dees, founder of the SPLC’s Klanwatch project. Despite denials from within Elohim City and the federal government, Dees asserts that McVeigh stayed at Elohim City a dozen times under the name Tim Tuttle. McVeigh also received a still-unpaid speeding ticket just outside the compound.

Then there was the strange case of Carol Howe—the one Millar’s son thought was a bit crazy—whose firsthand account

placed Elohim City at the epicenter of the bombing plot. A petite ex-debutante, Howe, 26, had a swastika tattooed onto her arm and began dating skinheads after being accosted by a group of blacks. The former Miss Teen America semifinalist was enlisted in October 1994 by ATF agent Angela Finley-Graham. Howe’s assignment: to report on suspicious activities within Elohim City.

Howe contends that two months before the bombing, she told her superiors that Rev. Millar was predicting an impending “cataclysm,” and that Strassmeir had discussed blowing up federal buildings in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. “Andy was always talking about mass shootings and bombings,” she later said in court.

After the blast, Howe was asked to return to Elohim City to check out possible connections to the bombing. She was frightened; but the FBI put her up in an Oklahoma City hotel room where, for four days, agents tried to persuade her to go back to the armed camp. She accepted only after an offer of a 300 percent raise and a “promotion” from the ATF to the FBI.

Two years later, Howe was indicted for possessing components of a pipe bomb she claimed she had gathered as an informant. During the subsequent trial, Howe’s lawyer testified that FBI and ATF agents had been warned about an Oklahoma City bomb plot. ATF agent Finley-Graham confirmed on the stand that Howe had worked as a confidential ATF informant but testified that she was dropped for being unstable and that Howe had made only vague mentions of the threats coming from Elohim City. In August 1997, Howe was cleared of all charges. “There’s a debate going on whether I’m a great American hero or whether I’m a conniving terrorist,” said the woman who has since been characterized as the “poster girl” for conspiracy theorists. At press time, she was preparing to testify before the state grand jury.

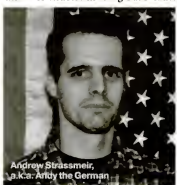
Elohim City wasn’t always an armed camp. But in 1983, Millar met Jim Ellison, leader of a neighboring crew known as the Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord (CSA). A fundamentalist preacher from Texas who converted to Christian Identity in 1976, Ellison fashioned CSA as his own army: He trained terrorists and manufactured hand grenades, machine guns, and silencers. Until 1985, CSA ran a Christian Martial Arts survival camp, which included sniper practice against cutout pictures of Menachem Begin, Golda Meir, and other renowned Israeli leaders.

“Millar taught CSA about God, and they taught Millar about guns,” said Kerry Noble, the former second in command of CSA, who now cooperates with law enforcement. After meeting Ellison,

Millar began arming his community “for defense and safety.” Weapons training became a staple. Children interspersed bible study with semiautomatic-rifle fire practice. “We believe it is their Christian duty to defend their home and family,” Millar told a local reporter.

Fringe groups like CSA and Elohim City have existed for decades, but not until the debates at Ruby Ridge and Waco were they agitated to action. “In ten days at Ruby Ridge, the federal government did more to unite this movement than ten years of organizing,” says one source within the militia. On October 22, 1992, about 200 people—including a hodgepodge of Christian Identity followers, tax resisters, and militant “patriots”—gathered at Estes Park, Colorado for the secretive Rocky Mountain Rendezvous. There, they discussed plans to break the movement into small kamikaze cells, a strategy known as leaderless resistance.

By design or coincidence, several of the most extreme underground white supremacists found their way to Elohim City. Grandpa Millar acted like a cordial quartermaster as he quietly allowed his community to provide a home base for weary commandos. Meanwhile, at least some local law enforcement officers continued to endorse the religious facade.



Andrew Strassmeir, a.k.a. Arkie the German

“You never know,” says Steve Howard, assistant chief of detectives for the Fort Smith, Arkansas police department, “if deep inside they aren’t true Christians willing to accept and forgive.”

Of all the outlaw militiamen who passed through Millar’s Aryan bed-and-breakfast, none received more attention than Richard Wayne Snell. Even though he was on death row and unable to visit Elohim City, Snell could count on his monthly prison visits from the kindly Reverend Millar.

In 1983, Snell began a grisly crime spree by murdering William Stumpp, a Texarkana pawnshop owner who was killed because Snell thought he was Jewish. Then, during a routine traffic stop, he fatally shot Arkansas state trooper Louis Bryant before fleeing into Oklahoma. When police officers trapped Snell at Broken Bow,



Controlled bomber Timothy McVeigh

Oklahoma, they riddled him with bullets. Believing he was about to die, Snell called for a preacher.

"I really became acquainted with Wayne when he was lying in a hospital bed with nine bullet wounds in his stomach," Reverend Millar told me. "His kneecap was shot off while he was lying on the ground; his shoulder was shot off. They thought he was dying." On his deathbed, Snell expressed no regrets. It was his destiny, he thought, to go down in a blaze of bullets. This deathbed farewell turned into a friendship when Snell miraculously survived to continue living on death row in Arkansas state prison at Vanner.

Then, in 1988, Snell was accused but not convicted of a plot to murder a federal judge and overthrow the government. During that trial, CSA leader and Elohim City regular Jim Ellison turned informer and gave a detailed account of Snell's plan to bomb the Murrah building—a plot that now sounds eerily similar to the successful 1995 attack.

"Wayne told me about different buildings that he had seen and wanted to know if I would look at them with him. I said I would," Ellison said. "I was asked to design something that could be placed in a trailer or van so it could be driven up to a given spot, parked there, and a time-detonating device could be triggered so the driver would have time to clear the area." This story was later corroborated by Noble. "We cased the building and made plans to blow up that building," he told a reporter from NBC news. If not for a mishap in the bomb-building lab, he says, "we would probably have blown up that building in 1983."

When I first met Robert Millar, he was 20 miles from Elohim City, stranded in the middle of a parking lot outside the traffic court in Van Buren, Arkansas. He squinted at me from behind the wheel of his freshly waxed black Lincoln Continental. A sticker on its rear bumper read: STOP THE HATE—SEPARATE.

Reverend Robert "Big Grandpa" Millar, the white separatist who founded Elohim City in 1975



I directed him out of the parking spot, and Millar invited me to lunch at Ruby's, his favorite cafeteria-style luncheonette. I immediately asked Millar who he thought was behind the Oklahoma City bombing. "There are certain small but strong echelons in some government bureaucracies that desire a confrontation with the patriotic movement, and that got us Ruby Ridge and Waco," he replied. "The purpose of this small echelon was to provoke a confrontation. If you note the location, Ruby Ridge is right in the middle of a strong patriotic population, so is Waco, Texas. I think that Oklahoma City was an extension of that philosophy—the government anticipated a confrontation, and, wisely, the rednecks and their ilk [by this I assume he meant his own more enthusiastic followers] restrained themselves."

Was anyone from Elohim City involved in the bombing?

"There are legitimate questions to be asked, though I don't know the answers." The bags under Millar's eyes hung heavily; he appeared to be exhausted. "I don't mind an honest investigation."

My line of questioning was thrown off by the special of the day.

"En-chile-da-da—are those the hard Doritos?"

toes?" he asked me.

You mean tacos? I said. Enchiladas are soft.

"Oh, the rubbery white ones?"

He settled on a meal of white turkey meat, mashed potatoes, and sinfully delicious pecan pie. I asked him about his community and how much longer he thought they could hold out against apocalypse. His face took on a look of grave concern as he told me that doom is just around the corner—like he's been saying for a quarter century.

"Oh, I think we are going to have complete disintegration of the national infrastructure," he said. "I will assume if we go another couple of decades. I think we are going to have race wars and international intervention."

I asked if he'd heard of any rap groups, and there was a long pause. "I don't know much about that subject," he said. Not even a single group? I pressed. Millar shook his head. "I'm very ignorant in that field." What music do you listen to, then? I was getting curious.

"I hate to tell you this," he said, "but I really like most of Lawrence Welk; then something by the Mormon choir."

When I asked Millar about his favorite U.S. politician, he stayed strangely silent, as if racking his brain, before announcing, "General Portugal" and "Salazar, the dictator of Portugal." I sensed that Millar was an intelligent if forgetful man whose reign was coming to an end. It is hard to feel threatened by a prophet who can't remember when new year comes on his own pagan calendar. When he retires, his heir apparent is former CSA leader Jim Ellison, who now lives at Elohim City with Millar's 27-year-old granddaughter, whom he married in 1995.

But Millar is still respected among his peers. He has never been convicted of a crime, but he does admit to forming a safe haven. "If Elohim City has been the unwitting host to bank robbers, terrorists, and murderers," Millar told one local reporter, "we comfort ourselves with the thought that our Leader has his feet washed by a prostitute, attended banquets, and drank wine with politicians and sinners and granted pardon to a criminal on death row."

During his decade on death row, Wayne Snell continued to publish a seditionist newspaper and became a living martyr to militant zealots. In 1995, when his appeals ran out, the state of Arkansas scheduled Snell's execution for April 19. Right-wing groups basted at the insult. To execute one of their leaders on the same day "federal Gestapo" slaughtered more than 80 Branch Davidians in Waco was a slap in the face.

Reverend Millar even dove to the governor's office in Little Rock and tried to warn him that they had made a mistake

by choosing April 19. "I thought, to some patriotic Americans, that date would be considered confrontational," Millar later explained. And in fact, on the faye driver's license he used to rent the Ryder truck, McVeigh listed his birth date as April 19.

The day before his execution, Snell predicted: "In the next ten days, there will be hell to pay." The guards responded by jacking up security at the prison. "He said there was going to be a huge bombing and not much more," said an Arkansas Department of Corrections spokesman. "He didn't give any impression that it would be a domestic bombing or something overseas; just that there would be some confusion as to who did it."

According to a prison log, Snell watched live coverage of the Murrah building explosion with a prison guard.



While enjoying a last meal of fried crapple, hush puppies, and a raw onion, he told the guard that Arkansas Governor Jim Guy had picked a bad day for his execution. A few minutes later, the guard noted that Snell was "smiling and chuckling" at the bombing reports.

As the "Tie-Down Team" tightened Snell's straps in Arkansas, rescue workers were pulling survivors from the rubble in Oklahoma. Minutes before a lethal intravenous cocktail was pumped into his arms, Snell uttered his last words: "Governor Tucker, look over your shoulder. Justice is on the way. I wouldn't trade places with you or any of your political cronies. Hail His victory. I am at peace."

After the execution, Millar recovered the body of his friend. "The funeral home put him in a casket, and we put him in the back of the van at midnight and brought him back here," said the Reverend, who helped bury Snell on a wooded slope. Today, the grave site is marked by a simple white cross held up by small red stones. It's a short walk from the community center at Elohim City. □

Additional reporting by Lori Tharps

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MACK 10

Father knows best

I look at my first album as, like, a warm-up," says Mack 10, leaning back in a cushy swivel chair and still glowing from the recent birth of his first son. "I've grown a lot as an artist. I listen to stuff on the first album and say, 'If I did that today, it would sure be different.'"

Mack 10's 1995 self-titled debut went gold despite a few loose musical screws; he tightened things up on his second project, last year's Westside Connection album, *Bow Down*. On it, Mack 10 refused to be the rookie—he stepped up his game in order to hang and bang with old hats Ice Cube and WC.

Then, the former Pop Warner tailback found himself looking down the field at his second solo album, *Based on a True Story*. "It was like I was itchin'," Mack says. "I couldn't wait to get in the studio to do my own record, 'cause I still had a lot of stuff to say."

So don't let the smooth taste of Mack's new single, "Backyard Boogie," fool you. The mixture of Ice Cube's "Get your boogie on" mantra, topped with the hook's A Taste of Honey sauce, just might make you question the "gangsta shit" Mack couldn't get enough of just a year ago. But with Cube riding shotgun through most of *True Story* and producers like Ant Banks, BobCat, and newcomer Binky fueling the majority of its drama-driven beats, Mack 10's new album is indeed another hoo-ride. "That's why I made sure 'Chicken Hawk 2' [his phrase for street hustlin'] was the first song on the album," he says, "just to let you know it's goin' down. I'm still a gangsta, and you fittin' to hear a whole lotta gangsta stuff on this album."

Street stories aside, Mack's now into developing his companies One-O Productions and Hoo-Bangin' Records—plus he's busy raising his young seeds. A quick, "not in this lifetime" smirk flashes across his face at the thought of lil' Mack Jr. strolling down the wrong track. "He needs to take the fact that I'm self-motivated and that I'm a real good businessman, as opposed to taking on my bad habits," Mack says. "I'm not perfect, but if I ever find out he's gangbanging, I'ma break his damn neck."

Cherie Saunders

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Call them boy crazy or bitchy or both, but SWV are still turning heads—and topping the charts!



PLAYING IT UP
Left: Coco, Taj

Tonya Pendleton gets to know the Sisters behind the Voices.

Photographs by Stephanie Pfriender

Dream Girls



Leanne "Lelee" Lyons drives up to a Houlihan's restaurant in Atlanta a half hour late. She's smiling like crazy and looks amazingly cool in her 1994 tan-and-white Mustang convertible, even though the top's up in deference to the day's unbearable humidity. In khaki shorts, an Express T-shirt, suede mules, and baseball cap, Lelee looks like any other Atlanta fly girl enjoying the peace of mind that clear skies and suburban living can bring. Plus, SWV's new album, *Release Some Tension*, is chilling in the near-platinum zone. For Lelee and her girls, worries are few.

Things weren't always this carefree for Lelee, or for any of her Sisters With Voices. Growing up, Lyons, 23, Tamara "Taj" Johnson, 23, and Cheryl "Coko" Gamble, who says her age is "nobody's business," dealt with a lot of death and disappointment. Then, like three Dorothys thrust into Oz, they were catapulted into the stratosphere by the success of their 1993 debut, *It's About Time*. SWV found themselves with too much, too fast. "When we first started out, we were silly—depending on other people to take care of our business," says Coko. "When things started going wrong, we were wondering why. Then we realized we were half-ass. We were starstruck. And you have to get over that."

SWV quickly acquired a reputation as "the female Jodeci"—the rowdiest girl group in R&B. Their every escapade—trysts with celebrity boyfriends, run-ins with journalists—was breathlessly covered in fanzines as their music ruled the airwaves. Their 1993 debut single, "I'm So Into You," went gold. The next single, 1993's "Weak," went platinum. Quickly thereafter came another gold single, "Right Here/Human Nature." "Anything," their smash coupling with the Wu-Tang Clan, was from their gold-selling 1994 *SWV Remixes*. Meanwhile, with racy singles like 1993's "Downtown" foreshadowing Foxy Brown and Lil' Kim, SWV were accused of terminal boy craziness and of lying about their ages and hair lengths—typical girl-group melodrama. But even worse, they were dismissed as substandard vocalists.

En Vogue they are not. But Lelee, Coko, and Taj sing better than a lot of multiplatinum girl crooners. The SWV sistren were—and are—100 percent *themselves*. No holds barred, no spin control. Asked about her love life in an interview last year, Coko replied, "That was like putting me in a candy store—all them fly-ass niggas. I was having a fucking ball."

So were Taj and Lelee. The trio dated members of Jodeci, Shai

and Intro. Taj fondly remembers daily water fights with Bell Biv DeVoe on 1993's Budweiser Superfest tour. ("There was always some kind of fun," she says.) Then there was a 1994 Madison Square Garden show in which the girls jumped around wildly onstage, leaving most of the audience wondering whether they were drunk or high or both. Taj says they were just having fun. "It was our homecoming!" she says.

"They're young-b-girls, New York style," says a music executive who has worked closely with the group. "They haven't evolved past that, and I don't think they want to. They want to be Uptown ghetto babes."

Right now, however, SWV want to enjoy what's left of their downtime, having quickly recorded their third album, the star-studded *Release Some Tension*. It's buoyed by singles such as the Puff Daddy-produced "Someone" (which jacks DJ Premier's masterful track from Biggie's "Ten Crack Commandments") and "Lose My Cool," which features a semisubdued Redman. But any member of SWV will tell you that recording *Tension* was just that—tense.

"I don't know if it sounds like it, but the album was rushed," says a candid Lelee. Furthermore, she says, SWV's ideas for the record weren't respected. "People come to you asking how you feel about a certain situation," Lelee says, toying with her chicken, "and you're saying to yourself, 'It doesn't matter what I think. You're going to do what you want to do anyway.'"

SWV's sophomore effort, last year's *New Beginning*, was relatively disappointing, selling less than a million copies despite the popular single "You're the One" and the lively "Use Your Heart." But after "Can We," SWV's sexy, Missy Elliott-penned cut from last summer's *Booty Call* soundtrack, became a surprise hit, *Tension* was hurried into production. Hoping to capitalize on the runaway success of "Can We"—and trying to squeeze out another album before Coko could fulfill her dreams of a solo album—RCA execs imposed a grueling recording schedule upon the girls.

Plus, after singing lead and writing for the last album, Lelee and Taj appear to have been pushed to the background on *Tension*—they contribute little more than oohs and aahs. Rappers such as Lil' Kim, Lil' Caesar, E-40, and Snoop Doggy Dogg appear on all but four songs. Only Coko has a writing credit, while at least eight different producers or production teams contributed to the record. The overall treatment caused SWV—even Coko—to feel dissed.

"They have a valid point when they say that their views and visions weren't really respected," says producer Brian Alexander Morgan, who wrote and produced 10 of the 15 songs on *It's About Time*. His sole contribution to *Tension* is the sensuous "Rain." "If you have a song the artist isn't feeling, they're not going to give you a hundred percent," Coko agrees. "If somebody gives me a song that I don't like and tells me that

I have to sing it, I'ma half sing the song. Like 'Someone'—that's a half-ass song. I feel like I could do that song ten times better."

But if Taj and Lelee harbor any resentment at the background roles they've been forced to play, it's definitely not directed at Coko—despite her plans to record a solo album. And Coko wears the badge of "leadership" somewhat uncomfortably. "If I'm singing everything, it's because I'm told to," she says warily, keeping a watchful eye on her son, Jazz. "People always

YOUNG B-GIRLS, NEW YORK STYLE
"People think we have control," says Coko. "It's not like that."



think that if it's your group, you have control. But it's not like that."

We got evicted, like, four, five times," Lelee says of her early years in the South Bronx. The youngest of six children, Lelee was 10 when her father abandoned the family. "There was plenty of times I came home from school and couldn't get in. I would just sit in front of my door and cry, knowing my mother couldn't pay the rent." A single mother at 15 and again at 17, Lelee had support from her children's father but little from her family. For her, success means vindication.

"After I had my first child, I had some family telling me I wasn't going to be nothing, that I was going to have all these kids and be on welfare. God made a way for me," Lelee says proudly. "If I wasn't doing this, I probably would be on welfare."

Lelee Lele, Taj has experienced her share of tragedy. By the time she was 14, both her mother and

father were dead from cancer. They died exactly five years apart. "When my mom passed away, I felt really abandoned because I wasn't happy where I was," Taj says, sitting in the dining room of her bi-level apartment. A framed photo of her boyfriend, the Orlando Magic's Dennis Scott, sits on a nearby shelf. Separated from her three brothers, Taj was sent to live with an aunt in Brooklyn. "She was strict," Taj says, as her beloved dogs, Tiffany and Shannon, bury their noses into her outstretched hand. "I was angry, very upset. I still go through my moments." The deaths still haunt her: The day after she attended Notorious B.I.G.'s funeral, she went out and bought life insurance policies for each of her siblings.

Although she's never known the pain of losing a mother, Coko never really knew her father. The pampered only child of gospel singer Tibba Gamble, Coko is guarded and slow to warm up to outsiders. But when she's with two-year-old Jazz, a softer side emerges. He's already a veteran of the road and travels with his mother when she's on tour. An outgoing toddler who likes to dance, Jazz is the mirror image of his father, Digable Planets' poetic Ishmael "Butterfly" Butler, Coko's former boyfriend.

"Working with SWV can be extremely fun, extremely easy, and quick—or it can be a nightmare, whatever Coko decides that day," says producer Morgan of the woman for whom "talented" and "spoiled" are often used in the same breath. The statuesque beauty does admit to being spoiled, rowdy, and wild during SWV's early days. "I'm still going to say what I have to say," Coko says, a quick flicker in her eyes. "You think that's spoiled? Oh, well."

Although Coko says she would never desert her homegirls, she admits that solo success could mean changes. "Don't get me wrong, I love hip hop," she says, "but I would like to do a real R&B album. And I want to sing with my mother. I just want to do something for myself. Something on my own."

Although the trio maintain a sisterly relationship (Taj is jazz's godmother), the odds are against SWV's staying together. Two or three years ago, groups like Shai and Intro were hot enough to date and tour with; now, they're footnotes in music history books.

"I think we'll just all decide to go our separate directions," Taj says. "When I decide to have kids, I'm not gonna travel no more. I'm not gonna sing no more. I'm going to settle down and raise my family." As if on cue, Shannon, Taj's pug, trots up, red tongue against her crinkled beige face. Taj smiles back at the pooch before picking her up and giving her a nuzzle. "Coko sat in our dressing room and cried because she missed Jazz's first step," Taj says. And when she says, "I don't want to miss nothing," she could be the voice of all three sisters. □

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Ice Cube: Michael Ochs; Poetic Justice: Michael Ochs; Poetic Justice: Michael Ochs; Poetic Justice: Michael Ochs



ACTING UP

Tupac Shakur made his name as a rapper; but his true power was unleashed on the silver screen. With the release of *Gang Related*, 'Pac's final film, *Gabriel Alvarez* asks, Was Shakur really the James Dean of our time?

Tupac Amaru Shakur was born to be a movie star. His lady-killer looks and boundless bravado served as the Molotov cocktail that fire-started his film career in 1992. He starred in six motion pictures, each time playing some variation of a tortured young soul—bursting with life but just a step ahead of death.

Shakur, who trained at the Baltimore School for the Arts as a teenager, was actually a better thespian than a mike wrecker. Despite his sometimes thugish-ruggish-to-the-bone image, his acting had real range. Tupac could make you squirm in your seat with his schizophrenic abandon, as he did in his 1992 debut, *Juice*, or melt you with a simple gaze, as he did one year later in John Singleton's otherwise unwatchable *Poetic Justice*.

Unnecessary were cheesy props like the scar his character, Birdie, wore in the even cheesier 1994 B-ball psychodrama *Above the Rim*. Or the eye patch and furry Kangol his character, Tank, rocked in this year's dismal, direct-to-video drug dramedy *Bullet*. But Tupac always rose above his cinematic circumstances by freaking the details: devilishly concealing a razor blade in his mouth, donning a creatively twisted-up bandanna, passionately chain-smoking cigarettes (as he did in this year's pretentious junkie flick *Gridlock'd*, with Tim Roth).

Asked to play the tough-guy role in more than half his films, Tupac became, on- and offscreen, the ultimate rebel without a pause—the James Dean, said Chuck

D., of our generation. Unfortunately, not one of Tupac's films was as good as any of Dean's—*Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *East of Eden* (1955), or *Giant* (1956). Actually, 'Pac seemed closer in spirit to Marlon Brando, whose dramatic day-to-day escapades were as talked about as his movie performances. Had Tupac lived long enough, he almost certainly would have parlayed his own wild experiences into larger-than-life, Don Corleone—or Colonel Kurtz—type roles.

Tupac's swan song is the Jim Kouf-directed *Gang Related*, costarring Lela Rochon and Jim Belushi. Miscast as Rodriguez—a crooked rookie cop plagued by his conscience—and working with an underwritten script, Tupac still manages to engage the audience with his let-it-all-hang-out charisma. The film's most striking moment comes when Belushi pulls a gun on Tupac and holds it to his head for what seems like an eternity while 'Pac stares incredulously offscreen. By the end, however, even Tupac can't rise above the film's overwrought, TV-movie-of-the-week feel.

In truth, Tupac's only really great big-screen performance was as Bishop in *Juice*. It was the part that brought him his first real taste of adulation and fame, and it was a part that he found could be played in real life for even more adulation and fame. So perhaps it's true that after *Juice*, Tupac, addicted to being in the spotlight, became unable to separate himself from the reckless thug warrior Bishop. Tupac Shakur was the ultimate method actor—he gave up his life for one big role. ■

city slickers



Soft suede, dark denim, and thick sweats for the new urban cowboys. *Photographs by Andre Passos. Styling by Emil Wilbekin*

Navy cotton plaid V-neck T-shirt by What Comes Around Goes Around, white cotton ribbed shirt by cK Calvin Klein Jeans, vintage denim cowboy hat by Levi's; navy wool knit zip cardigan by Esprit, sea green cotton Michael Jackson T-shirt by What Comes Around Goes Around

Navy suede cow-boy shirt by Polo Jeans Co., white V-neck cotton T-shirt by Polo by Ralph Lauren, denim jeans with white stitching by Eynce, sneakers by Lugz; brown suede knit jacket by What Comes Around Goes Around, denim skirt by Esprit; beige polyester button-down shirt with brown stitching by Reactor+, taupe corduroy pant by Union Bay





LEFT: White tank top by Calvin Klein Underwear, gray zip-front hoodie by Todd Oldham Jeans, black leggings by OMO Norma Kamali, cowboy hat by Justin; denim cowboy shirt and jeans, both by Todd Oldham Jeans; olive Ultrasuede jacket by 26 Red, black wool rib turtleneck by Polo Jeans Co., black polyester warm-up pants with white and navy stripes by And 1, sunglasses by Tommy Hilfiger

RIGHT: Brown suede shearing coat by Polo Jeans Co.; baby blue vintage Levi's corduroy jacket by What Comes Around Goes Around; Dallas Cowboys replica jersey by Starter; vintage cowboy hat by Levi's





LEFT: Denim jacket by Levi's; black floral lace stretch tank by Calvin Klein Underwear

RIGHT: Red poly-cotton hooded zip-front jacket by Dickies, vintage denim shirt by Wrangler, sky blue cotton Pac-Man T-shirt by What Comes Around Goes Around, taupe cotton cargo pant by Luggz, Western belt by Billy Martins; navy wool zip cardigan by Esprit, denim skirt by Mecca USA; tan leather coat by GUESS? Leather, gray fleece hoodie by Twism, black-and-white herringbone wool cargo pant by Enyce; navy cotton PLAYBOY T-shirt by What Comes Around Goes Around, blue jean by Reactor+, G-Shock watch by Casio

BELOW: Black vintage patchwork leather jacket by What Comes Around Goes Around; gray long-sleeve T-shirt by Mecca USA; black mesh polyester tear-away pants by And 1; cowboy boots by Justin. SEE THE DETAILS



VIBEFASHION

NIGHT

On to the next
millennium! Six
designers are cutting
fashion's edge.

Photographs by Arnaldo

Anaya-Lucca. Styling

by Emil Wilbekin

PRADA/MIU MIU:
Gray stretch wool
pants and lavender
cotton organza
tunic, both by
Miu Miu, shoes by
Prada, bracelet by
Ten Thousand
Things, black
leather jacket,
black cashmere
turtleneck, black
wool flannel
stretch pants, and
boots, all by Prada



& DAY

VERSUS by
VERSACE: Navy
mock turtleneck
sweater, navy wool
wrap miniskirt,
and navy cutout
ankle boots, all by
Versus by Versace;
bracelet by Ten
Thousand Things;
earring by Jill
Platner

JOHN BARTLETT:
Charcoal pinstripe
wool chesterfield
jacket, charcoal
asymmetrical wool
rib mockneck
sweater, and char-
coal pinstripe wool
pants with side
buckle, all by John
Bartlett; boots by
Patrick Cox





HELMUT LANG:
Black wool blazer,
black wool pants
with beige band;
black wool tuxedo,
white cotton shirt,
and red cummer-
bund, all by Helmut
Lang; gloves by
LaCrasia



GUCCI: Brown
wool mohair
pants, black wool
tuxedo pants,
brown leather
belts with gold G
buckles, and
boots, all by Gucci

**COSTUME NATIONAL
HOMME:** Black polyester mockneck shirt,
black plaid polyester-acrylic glimmer pants,
and black patent leather boots, all by
Costume Homme, watch by TagHeuer;
black and silver acrylic collar-V-neck shirt,
black wool flatfront pants, all by Costume
Homme, gray leather ankle boots by Patrick
Cox; black polyamide micromini, black
leather sash, and black and silver swirl ban-
dieu with arm cuff, all by Costume National,
knee boots by Stuart Weitzman, glove by
LaCrasia. SEE THE
DETAILS





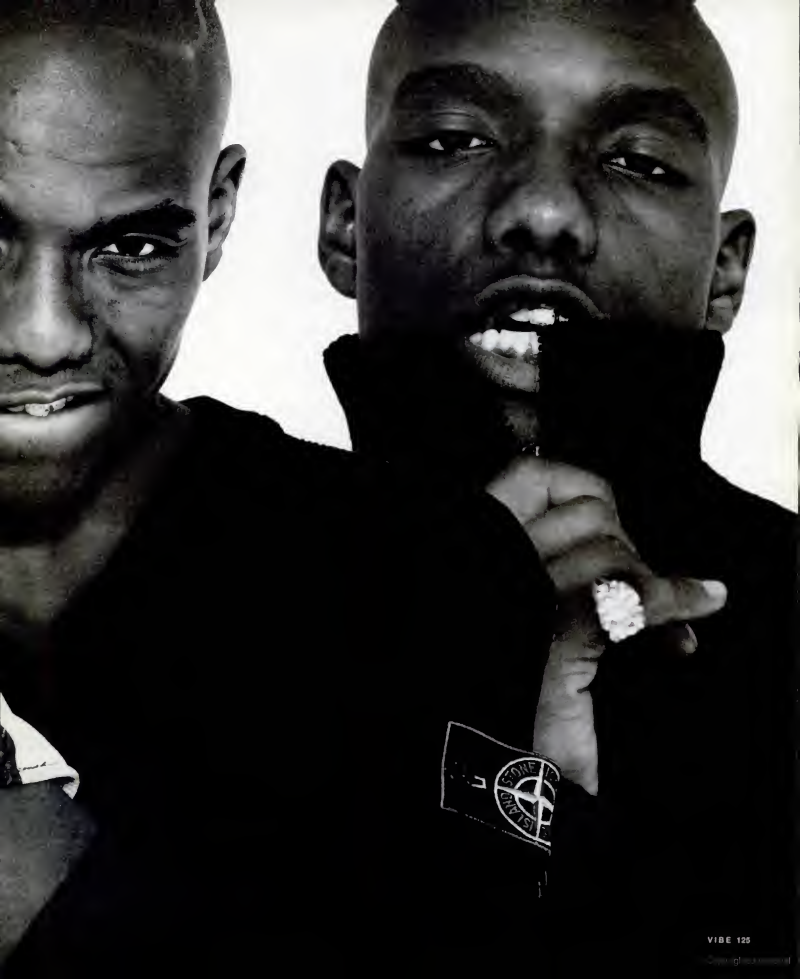
THE **Stylist**

DESIGNER FASHION

Stone Island



"Cold chillin' " best defines Stone Island. The 15-year-old sportswear company creates thick, beautiful chenille sweaters, durable, brushed-twill dress pants, high-tech pea coats, and cozy parkas that look good and protect you against rain, sleet, and snow. Designer Paul Harvey uses futuristic fabrics such as transparent, waterproof, lightweight nylon; he's created the ultimate water repellent, sheer yellow windbreaker. Available at Ron Herman/Fred Segal in Melrose, Los Angeles and Jekyll & Hyde, N.Y.C. (or by calling 212-366-9595), Stone Island is an investment for people who want to style and profile—and keep it warm.



Fetish;
Hugo
Boss's
Woman



COMME des GARÇONS' White;
Giorgio Armani's Acqua di Giò



Versace's Black Jeans; Swiss Army



Stylist

DESIGNER FASHION

Scoop

Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana are at it again. In addition to opening their D&G and Dolce & Gabbana boutiques in New York City, the dynamic designing duo are also releasing their second dance-music CD single, "More, More, More." The disc features a redux of Andrea True's 1976 classic club hit; it'll soon be remixed by superDJ Junior Vasquez....GUESS? seems to have legs. The California-based jeanswear company is now producing men's dress and athletic socks as well as women's socks and tights....Speaking of jeanswear (sort of), fabric companies around the world are currently creating a kind of denim that includes Kevlar—the material used to make bullet-resistant vests. Look for these new bulletproof jeans next year at department stores everywhere....That's not the only trend in anti-violence dressing. Uniformity, a South-Central Los Angeles-based uniform company, has created a collection of clothing that fulfills private-school dress codes but protects kids against gang violence by avoiding dangerous color affiliations....With everyone from Russell Simmons to Sean "Puffy" Combs on the golf tip, New Balance has decided to jump on the tee. Famous for their classic running shoe, the sneaker company is releasing the New Balance 1250 this fall for the green hounds....The New York Knicks' John Starks is the new spokesman for Original Man War, a collection of golf- and rugby-style shirts, T-shirts, sweatshirts, and polar-fleece pullovers. Hoop! There it is.

Emil Wilbekin

Calvin Klein's Contradiction; Gucci's Envy



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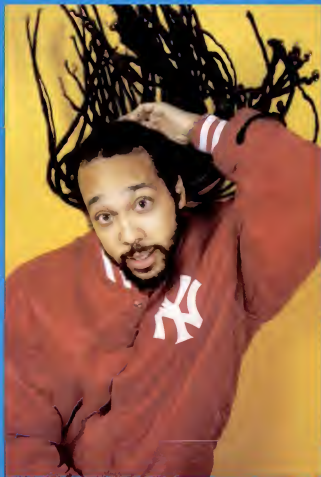


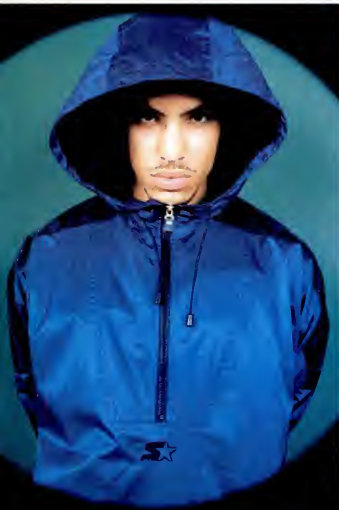


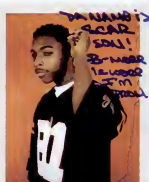
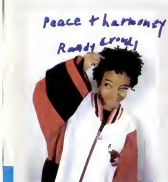
From professional workshops to off-the-hook parties, business luncheons to meetings of entertainment moguls, the VIBE Music Seminar at the Waldorf-Astoria in NYC boosts awareness, embraces, and solidifies the power of hip hop, urban culture, and fashion. As the Big Willies, rappers, and music playaz hob-knobbed and networked, one of the biggest attractions was Starter.

Nestled in the high-energy Cyberlounge, the Starter booth drew celebrities like Funkmaster Flex and Jermaine Dupri, singers and dancers, parents and kids. Everyone was lining up to have their flick taken by hot-shot VIBE photographer Ben Watts for the second annual Starter photo session.

The attire: Starter's new collection for Foot Locker, like their original satin team jackets, team jerseys, skullies and baseball caps. As you can see, everybody at the VIBE Music Seminar got their groove all the way on.







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New roles in *Gang Related* and *Knock Off* take Lela Rochon from stripper to stuntwoman and beyond. By Jeff Yang

Hong Kong, 1997. Monsoon season has come early to the former British colony's neon-streaked streets. The air is hot and wet and still; a conscious effort is required to breathe, and a phenomenal act of will is required even to move. Lela Rochon, the too-tasty star of 1995's *Waiting to Exhale* and 1996's *The Chamber*, has been here on location for seven weeks, surviving the pressure-cooker heat, torrential downpours, and, oh yes, the handover of Hong Kong to Communist mainland China, all while shooting her latest stepping stone to stardom, a Jean-Claude Van Damme action jack called *Knock Off*.

"The weather's been unbelievable," says Rochon, who plays a high-powered federal agent. "My first day working, it was a hundred-and-ten degrees with one-hundred percent humidity. I was dying. My body mike wouldn't stay on because of the sweat—it just kept sliding down my pants."

Then Rochon offers a suggestion for beating the heat: "Would you mind if we did this by the pool?"

Who would mind? Especially if it means peeping Lela in a slim, lemon yellow one-piece. (Which it does mean. Very distracting.) During her island stay, Rochon has been frequenting her hotel's rooftop spa—not only to keep cool but to smooth out the rigors of a typically hectic, Hong Kong-style shoot. "The whole Chinese system of filmmaking is an adjustment," she laughs. "For example, we don't know whether we're working tomorrow or not. It's eight-thirty at night, and we probably won't find out until ten-thirty this

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movies

dr. snakeskin's HOME VIDEO VIEWS

trippin' down memory lane

In the tradition of the jazz world's "cutting contests," the underlying motive for 1967's *Monterey International Pop Festival* was to settle regional rivalries between the bands of northern and southern California. With their trance-like improvisations and LSD-inspired happenings, San Francisco musicians saw themselves as psychedelic minstrels for social change and actively disdained the commercialism of the studio-oriented pop bands of Los Angeles.

What the San Franciscans didn't consider was the existence of L.A.-based artists like Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, the Doors, and Love's Arthur Lee, a proto-punk Watts homeboy who pioneered the granny-glasses-and-fringe-jacket rocker look. Instead of enlisting such fiercely creative minds, the festival organizers booked such L.A. mainstreamers as the Mamas and the Papas and the Association to go head up with some of the Bay Area's best—Big Brother and the Holding Company, Jefferson Airplane, and so on.

Luckily, however, the festival—commemorated by Rhino Records' three-video release of *Monterey Pop*, *Otis at Monterey*, and *Jimi Plays Monterey*—developed into much more than a music turf war. From around the country and across the oceans, it brought together the likes of Otis Redding, Lou Rawls, Hugh Masekela, and the man who made music from feedback (and upstaged the Who with his ass-kicking performance): Jimi Hendrix. Not only was Monterey the '60s' first important rock festival, it also represented, as Barney Hoskyns points out in *Waiting for the Sun*, "the transition from pop to rock...[signaling] the beginning of a new era in rock 'n' roll."

Filmed 30 years ago by D.A. Pennabaker (who also directed the Dylan doc *Don't Look Back*), *Monterey Pop* is not just another time-capsule concert film. By capturing moments of performance genius and celebratory optimism, the three documentaries (and four CDs, sold separately) bring the revolutionary spirit of the era to life. Crowded with body-painted, fluorescent-garbed freaks, the festival foretold the ecstasy-saturated dance floors of today's rare culture.

So, pick up *Monterey*, drop that blotter of brown-dirt acid, and get your tie-dyed love VIBE on with Otis, Jimi, Janis, and that Star-planet fool, Ray Shankar. As Austin Powers would say, it's the real thing, bay-bee!

the house of yes

PARAMOUNT

Meet the Pascal family, a rich, mansioned clan living in Virginia. The Pascals' patriarch disappeared the same day JFK was shot, and since then, his mentally disturbed, incestuous twins, Marty (Josh Hamilton) and Jackie O (a shamelessly hammy Parker Posey), have been reenacting the assassination, as well as John and Jackie's sex life.

One Thanksgiving day, Marty shows up at the family compound with his whole-some fiancée (30210's Tori Spelling), which,



predictably, pushes a jealous Jackie O over the edge. What ensues is a whole lot of dialogue meant to be arch and probing, but it just grates like chalk on a chalkboard. *The House of Yes* was adapted from a well-regarded play; but, be forewarned: Unless you've got a fetish for overdrawn schizophrenic women, this one is best seen onstage.

Gary Dauphin

boogie nights

NEW LINE

In this intimate and compelling portrait of Los Angeles' seedy adult-entertainment industry circa 1977, the artist formerly known as Marky Mark gives his best performance to date. Mark Wahlberg stars as Dirk Diggler, a gullible high school dropout who parlays his biggest asset—a thick 13 inches—into porn stardom.

With the help of a powerhouse ensemble cast

including Burt Reynolds, Julianne Moore, and Don Cheadle, writer/director



Paul Thomas Anderson creates likable yet deeply flawed characters, and illustrates how the naive hedonism of the decade gave rise to the sobering mean-spiritedness of the '80s. Anderson also entertains with plenty of cheese dip: big feathered hair, bright polyester clothes, as well as essential cuts from Night Ranger, ELO, and Melanie, and the whole cast freaking the electric slide.

Nicole Jefferson

kiss the girls

PARAMOUNT

In 1995's *Seven*, Morgan Freeman played Somerset, an intuitive police detective who searches for a methodic psychopath. In 1997's *Kiss the Girls*, Freeman plays Dr. Alex Cross, an intuitive police detective who searches for a methodic psychopath. *Girls* lacks *Seven*'s daringly sludgy look and narrative terseness, but the rock-steady Freeman's skills are, as always, off the scale. This should be the end of the review.



What *Girls* has going for it that *Seven* doesn't, though, is—trust me—what's got to be the most inventive, spur-of-the-moment use for a half gallon of milk in film history. That, and Ashley Judd, whose effortlessly natural portrayal of a brainiac doctor who joins forces with Freeman, is reason enough to pay your \$8.50.

Harry Allen

eve's bayou

TRIMARK

The black familiar mingles with the supernatural in sistagirl Kasi Lemmons' stunning directorial debut, *Eve's Bayou*. Set in a backwater Louisiana town circa 1962, the film tells the story of the well-to-do Batiste clan through the eyes of a precocious 10 year old named Eve (Jurnee Smollett). Aided by her aunt Mozelle (Debbi Morgan of ABC's *All My Children* fame, who gives fever all over the screen) and Etzora (Diahann Carroll), the local black



magic woman, Eve attempts to uncover her seemingly perfect family's secrets, which mostly revolve around her father's (Samuel L. Jackson) infidelity to her mother (Lynn Whitfield). Part family drama, part voodoo folk tale, *Eve's Bayou* feels less like a scripted narrative than a haunting tableau of one black girl's tragic loss of innocence.

N.J.



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tv

the fresh princess

Whitney passes the tiara to Brandy in a multicultural remake of *Cinderella*

Once upon a time, a lovely chambermaid, blessed by a fairy godmother, slipped into Prince Charming's glass slipper and lived happily ever after (leaving her evil stepsisters in the dust). What girl couldn't

fall in love with a story like that? Dating back to 9th century China, the *Cinderella* fable has stood the test of time like no other. In 1697, Charles "Mother Goose" Perrault flipped it in French. In 1812, Jakob Grimm rolled it out with his big collection of fairy tales, delighting countless little German *kinder*. Closer to home, Walt Disney, in 1950, pulled out all the stops to make a feature-length *Cinderella* cartoon. Then, in 1957, composers Rodgers and Hammerstein con-



jured a lavish television musical production of *Cinderella* for Julie Andrews that, at the time, attracted one of the largest TV audiences ever.

Notice a theme here? Whitney Houston and one of her friends, film producer Debra Chase, did "Whitney and I grew up with musicals like this one and *Peter Pan*," says Chase, whose credits include last year's Denzel Washington/Meg Ryan drama, *Courage Under Fire*. "And as we reflected on these musicals that profoundly affected us, we wondered, Why is everyone white? *A-ah!*" These are our modern-day myths, Chase says and Houston decided, "and children of all colors dream. We believed the time was right for this version."

At first, Whitney was going to play the lucky chambermaid, but that was back in 1994, before Bobbi Kristina came along. When she finally had a chance to focus on this \$12 million remake of the Rodgers and Hammerstein version, she decided she might be a bit old to wear the tiara. So she dialed Miss Brandy Norwood and said, "Hi! This is your fairy godmother." Presto!

Along with an all-star ensemble cast (are you ready for Bernadette Peters as the Wicked Stepmother and *Seinfeld*'s Jason Alexander as the prince's steward?), the Disney-backed extravaganza will feature three new songs (and the best *singing* *Cinderella* in 1,000 years). The prince will be played by fresh-faced Paolo Montalban (no relation to Ricardo), who's from the Philippines, and Whoopi Goldberg will play his mother. Is that progressive or what?

"What I love about the prince is that he isn't just holding out for a pretty girl," says Montalban. "He's looking for someone who will complete him as a person, and he finds all those qualities in *Cinderella*. And if anybody has a problem with that, remind them that the original *Cinderella* was Chinese! What?!"

Omar Bradley

Cinderella airs Sunday, November 2 at 7 p.m. EST on ABC.

shoot: Pras's "Avenues"

text and photos
by Ernie Paniccioli

The glitzy razzle-dazzle of Las Vegas was transposed to Brooklyn for "Avenues." This single (from the Money Talks soundtrack) features the Fugees' Pras reinterpreting Eddy Grant's 1983 hit "Electric Avenue." Directed by video vanguard Hype Williams and featuring colead vocals by Kyrri Mari Marley, the clip was shot in a Queens soundstage and on location in Brooklyn. The curbs of Arlington and Halsey Streets in Bedford-Stuyvesant were lit up with hundreds of lights to give the illusion of a neon effect. Not to be outdone by his incandescent surroundings, Pras was outfitted in a specially made suit that was covered in dozens of lightbulbs. Then, after a costume change, Pras donned a black suit, pink shirt, and gloves for the video's finale: an off-the-hook impression of Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" dance routine. Light it up, Pras.



the celluloid underground

Fox Television Studios is digging deep for the next generation of talent

Say you have an idea for the next TV version of *Cops*. You try pitching the networks, but Hollywood isn't returning your calls. Don't worry, all hope is not lost: David Grant, president of the Los Angeles-based Fox Television Studios (FTS), will get back to you.

FTS's mission is to recruit writers, producers, musicians, and performers from nontraditional places—everywhere from Web sites to (way) off-Broadway plays—and pair them with established Hollywood types. "We're looking to give young, new talent a home so we can take them through the creative process, all the way from the beginning to the end," says Grant.

Grant expects programs developed with FTS, like big-budget TV movies, mini-series, and game shows, to end up everywhere from BET to the History Channel to the major networks. "Budding filmmakers shouldn't believe the system is closed and there's no way in," says Grant. "If this studio is successful, it will be limited and open up the entire industry."

Andy Levinson

For more information, write to: Fox Television Studios, PO Box 900, Beverly Hills, CA 90213-2000



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word

when art and pictures speak...

Often, pop art forms such as comics and graphics are nothing more than eye candy.

Recently, however, many of the most daring comic and graphic artists have been using their craft to make important

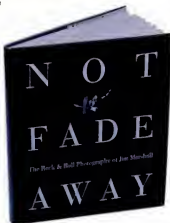
statements about issues such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. *Dangerous Drawings* (Juno Books), edited by Andrea Juno, is a bold collection of interviews with 14 of the world's most outstanding pop artists—including Julie Doucet, Emiko "Carol" Shimoda, and Matt Reid—who work in genres ranging from comics, graffiti, manga (a Japanese form of animation), and graffiti-inspired art. *Dangerous Drawings* offers the reader a chance to see how politics and life experience have affected the work of these innovative pop artists.

Just as visually appealing, but in a different vein, is music photographer Jim Marshall's latest collection of pictures, *Not Fade Away* (Bullfinch Press/Little, Brown and Company). This volume gives readers a glimpse into the worlds of the rock 'n' roll geniuses of our time. Photos featuring the great Muddy Waters meditating on the blues, the usually overanimated Mick Jagger in introspective mood, or Jimi Hendrix frizzing up Noel Redding's hair backstage at a concert are as breathtaking as listening to the artists' records for the first

time. *Not Fade Away* is a stunning

collection of photos that conveys, warmly and intimately, the spirit of an era that changed the course of human history. If there's any truth to the cliché about a picture's being worth a thousand words, this book merits a library.

Charlie R. Braxton



gloria's glory

In her colorful autobiography, *I Will Survive* (St. Martin's Press), songstress Gloria Gaynor documents her journey from disco sensation to born-again Christian. After her celebrity subsided, Gaynor endured marital problems and sought refuge in food, alcohol, and drugs. "I hated cocaine," she says of her nose-candy experiences. "But it was the only way I could keep up—and be accepted by others."

Although the phenomenal singer's story is a testament to what spiritual faith can provide, Gaynor's excessive ramblings about her



pooch, Diamond, and her four best friends would shorten the attention span of even the most devoted fan. Ultimately, however, Gaynor provides a satisfying glimpse into how she managed to make her life imitate her international hit. After all the "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll," Gaynor learned to survive.

Kenye N. Byrd

lovely mini fables

In *Loverboys* (Plume), her first collection of short stories, award-winning author Ana Castillo delivers 23 tales of friendship, love, and lust that defy stereotypes of culture and gender.

Castillo's tales feature intense and tangible characters in passionate relationships; her writing ranges from funny end streetwise to tender and lyric.

From the title story, in



which a woman reminisces about a former lover, to "La Miss Rose," about a Caribbean fortune-teller on a mission to help the love-lorn. Castillo creates protagonists you can relate to—or may even know. Her keen narrative skills shine in "Conversations With an Absent Lover on a Beechless Afternoon"; here, the shortest of short stories proves to be the most intense. *Loverboys* is a compelling read, enthralling from beginning to end.

Kwell L. Wright

keeping hope alive

In *Restoring Hope* (Beacon), Cornel West conducts nine discussions about black America. The book, edited by Kelvin Sealey, pairs West with cultural impresarios ranging from Maya Angelou to Haki Madhubuti.

Despite West's mediocre one-on-one moderating, the contributors offer compelling arguments, like when Bill Bradley cogently explains white-skin privilege or when Harry Belafonte laments that young blacks

Restoring Hope



don't connect with his generation. Although West agrees with Belafonte, the book's youngest subject is 36-year-old Wynton

Marsalis. Go figure.

West's remarks are often distracting because their intent verges on intellectual one-upmanship (read: Goooo, Harvard). Nevertheless, each discussion is insightful and informative. If you find any debate surrounding the state of American culture engaging, *Restoring Hope* is for you.

OJ Lima

rockin' it

When the media anointed Chris Rock his apparent to the comedic thrones of Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy, some of us were, like, "Yeah, right." After all, what had he really done besides tell a good barbecue joke and star in a few commercials and comedy specials?

But with *Rock This!* (Hyperion), his new laugh-



out-loud humor book (much of which was lifted from his critically acclaimed HBO special *Bring the Pain*), Rock shows that he's real, raw, and has already taken the throne. Ripping into everything from crack to rap to racism, Rock doesn't just make you laugh; he makes you think. On the "assassinations" of Biggie and Tupac: "Martin Luther King was assassinated. Malcolm X was assassinated. Those rappers just got shot....School is still going to be on in their birthdays. There won't be a picture of the two hanging in grandma's kitchen." You can't get any realer than that.

Nichole Christian



tech

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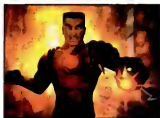
What's black, box-shape, has a CD, radio, and TV, and is made by a car manufacturer? Yep, you guessed it, the Jeep TV Boom Box. Not content to fill the roadways with boxes on wheels, Jeep and its subsidiary, Jeep Electronics, have come up with a rugged, good-looking toy that keeps on popping even if you drop it in a river (as



long as you fish it out promptly). From the sleek speedometer-shape radio dial to the chunky CD player (which resembles a gas-tank cap) to the pop-up, three-inch TV screen, the box is fully autoerotic. At \$499.95, it comes complete with an AC/DC adapter, a removable antenna, and space to store a dozen or more compact discs. The function keys are shiny silver switches that, when flicked, make you think you're thrusting into overdrive even though you're only changing channel. With jacks at the back to allow for video linkup, the Jeep Boom Box is almost perfect, save for the wack side speakers. But then, it's a Jeep, not a Lexus.

Chiedo Nkorocho

blast if you have to



Imagine waking up one morning and finding your left hand replaced by a metallic cybercannon. You have no idea how you got into this predicament, but you are under attack. What to do now? In the case of John Cain, hero of ASC Games' new shoot-'em-up, ONE (available in November for Sony PlayStation), the answer is to blast, and blast everything! That's the simple, brutal premise behind this

new 3-D action game in which your goal is to kill or be killed while searching for the truth.

Instead of the traditional health meter keeping track of wounds inflicted to your surrogate body, ONE uses a rage meter—that is, your strength literally depends on how many enemies you destroy. At your disposal are the usual, lethal arsenal of weapons, including plasma cannons, flamethrowers, and missile launchers. And with a player control setup that is reminiscent of Tomb Raider's, the gameplay action is dangerously intense. All in all, a perfect game to release stress. Highly recommended for U.S. postal workers!

Gregg Bishop

home cooking

ssst. Wanna know a secret? That guy Beck didn't just use two turn-

bles and a microphone. Like many latter-day rap disciples, he relied on a vast supply of super-high-tech gadgets to help him drop those extrashiny audio jewels. But don't despair: The hip hop game is nothing if not hands-on. The equipment you need is now within reach of everyone. We crashed the recent NAMA (National Association of Music Merchants) trade show in Nashville, Tennessee so we could provide you with a sneak preview of the latest in home-cooking appliances.

Two products from the Roland Corporation U.S. created a big buzz at the show—the MC-303 Groove Box and SP-202 Dr. Sample. Priced at \$895, the MC-303 is an integrated sequence/sound module that comes fully stocked with those ridiculously phat subsonic bass sounds that made Roland's TR-808 and TR-909 so famous. The SP-202 is an affordable (\$395), easy-to-use sampler that features a full four minutes and 20 seconds' worth of internal sampling time—enough to recycle, say, an entire song by the Police. With removable 4MB SmartMedia cards, users can store a whopping 35 minutes of samples. Plus there are six tasty effects and a pitch control that lets you speed up the tempo without making the vocals sound like Alvin and the Chipmunks.

"Be cool in your own studio," promises the packaging of Magix Music: Studio 3.0, a CD-ROM for Windows 95 users that allows you to sample, record, and mix tracks from your own milk crate. Even if you don't buy the manufacturer's claim that "deep inside, everyone is as creative

as Amadeus," this is a good, basic program that combines flexibility and affordability. Priced at just \$49.99, the Music Studio is the ideal way to get your foot in the production game

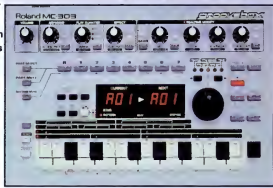
without having to pawn your vinyl collection. For those who already have, there's the Magix Music Maker, which comes with a variety of basic drum,

the digital puno6rapun

pick up on this...

Naked Eye: Jill Cunliff, lead singer of the group Luscious Jackson, has signed up to be the voice of "digital actress" Laura Lewis, who stars in Sega's new video game/interactive movie *Enemy Zero*. Cunliff, who also fronted the Jackson spin-off group the Kostars, took the role because it gave her the chance to "convey all the terror, frustration, anger, and surprise found in the game." Sounds like a music industry veteran....Say Cheese: A recent trend in CD-ROMs seems to be photo-editing programs that allow anybody with a computer to rustle up custom-made snaps. Picture It! 2.0 and LivePix are two such applications that let non-computer whiz kids create cards and posters, and hook up some Forrest Gump-type celebrity photo-ops. No doubt, that was me next to the President, and, uh-huh, that was your man doin' the Macarena with Ms. del Rio.

bass, and bug-out samples already loaded. (You can purchase additional sample discs with titles like "Dance,"

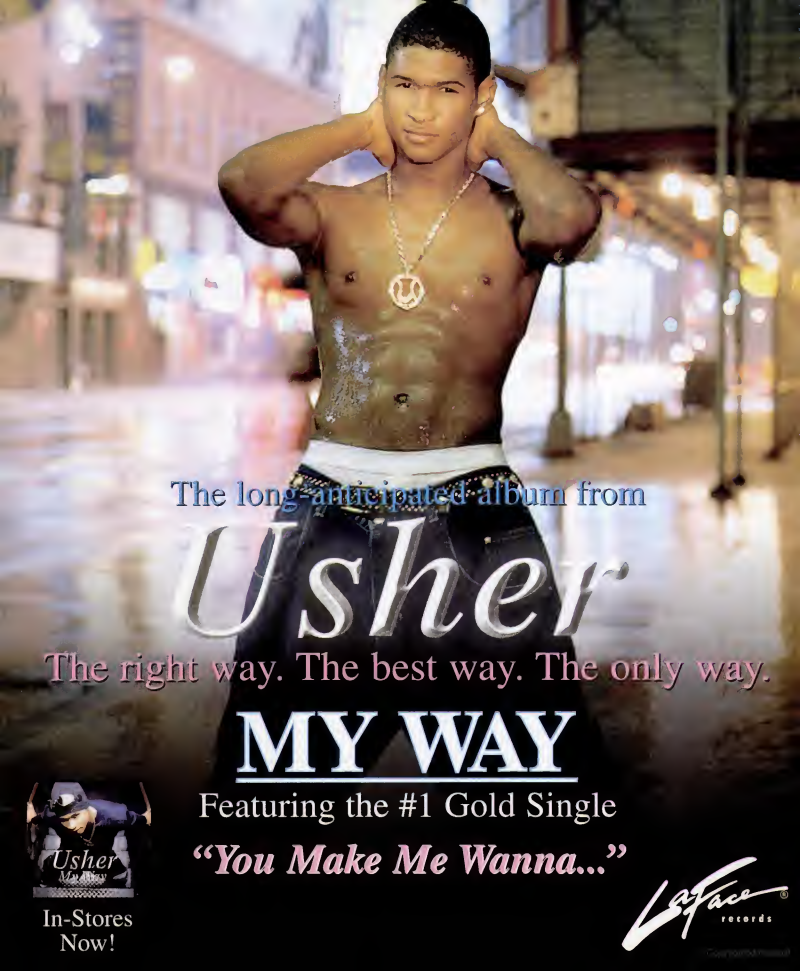


"Techno," "Rap," "Ambient," and "P-funk.") What's the point, you ask? We're not sure—but it's cool.

Henry Collins



www.1800collect.com

A full-page background image of Usher in a city street at night. He is shirtless, wearing a gold chain with a large 'U' pendant, and has his hands behind his head. The street is wet and reflects the city lights.

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REVOLUTIONS



BOYZ II MEN 'EVOLUTION' MOTOWN RECORDS BY SCOTT POULSON-BRYANT

In their six-year career, Boyz II Men have withstood personal tragedy, music industry ineptitude, and the dumbed-down, all-about-the-Benjamins regression of contemporary black music—and still outlasted the competition. Do you know the way to H-Town? Probably not. The cream does rise to the top—and stays there if the stars are aligned in just the right way.

Longevity in music often has as much to do with the backstage abilities of the management team as with the onstage capabilities of the stars. Corporate strategy can be the key that unlocks the doors to more than just the promised land of increased royalty rates and vanity record deals. If carried out properly, it should lead to a career that allows for creative risk taking after all the bills have been paid. In other words, when you sell 23 million records, like Boyz II Men have, you should be able to do whatever you please—including working with the best producers and finding the best songs. Which, for the most part, the Philadelphia quartet have done this time around on their sixth album—with simultaneously brilliant and confusing results.

Evolution opens with a bang. "Doin' Just Fine," written by Shawn Stockman, is dazzlingly mature songcraft paired with some of the slickest crooning Boyz II Men have ever done.

And for six straight tracks, Boyz II Men top themselves over and over again. The lush, overorchestrated balladry they're famous for has been replaced by a touching subtlety. None of the vocal power is lost; instead, new confidence is gained. No more boyish melodrama. With grace and skill, the Boyz in the band have indeed morphed into Men, and they have the songs to prove it.

Jam and Lewis's pulsatingly percussive "4 Seasons of Loneliness" rivals anything the duo have concocted in their long career and is far better than the weightless stuff they gave Mary J. Blige on her *Share My World*. "Loneliness" segues into the achingly beautiful Babyface tune "Girl in the Life Magazine," an ode to the sort of adolescent attraction that often follows us into adulthood. In less assured company, the fragile sentiments of "Girl" might have veered off into novelty territory; but here, BJM find the perfect melancholic tone. "A Song for Mama" is the kind of honorable testament Babyface seems to be able to write in his sleep, but the lilting melody engages and lifts the song into the upper stratosphere of the superproducer's increasingly expanding repertoire.

This six-song suite, which gives the album its heft, is anchored by "Can You Stand the Rain," the Jam and Lewis classic that New Edition made famous on their 1988 boys-to-men breakthrough, *Heart Break* (and, ironically, the song Boyz II Men sang in their audition for Michael Jackson). Breath-takingly simple in their approach, Stockman, Wanya Morris, Michael McCrary, and Nathan Morris do it a cappella, minus the opulent orchestration that has cemented the song in Quiet Storm history. It's a bold, ballsy move. Giving the song's pliant melody front-and-center placement, Boyz II Men seem to be thanking Jam, Lewis, and New Edition for setting the stage for their own success while concurrently staking their own claim as some of the most stylish song interpreters in a long, long time.

No more boyish melodrama. With grace and skill, the Boyz in the band have indeed morphed into Men, and they have the songs to prove it.

Unfortunately, the album doesn't sustain the passionate momentum that drives the first six songs into classic status. The singing never falters, but the song choices seem questionable. Whose bright idea was it to put Boyz II Men in the studio with Sean "Puffy" Combs? Granted, Puff Daddy has deservedly become the star producer of the moment, but his riffish, loop-heavy style is not at all conducive to Boyz II Men's accessible, free-flowing methodology. Combs will undoubtedly be one of the icons of late 20th-century popular culture and will sustain his visionary approach to life and style long into the 21st century. But despite his recent songs with folks ranging from L.J. Kim and the Notorious B.I.G. to SWV and Mariah Carey—pop masterpieces all—Puffy is most certainly a remixer, not a songwriter. And Boyz II Men need real songs with which to create their most memorable performances.

Although the background vocals are always stellar—full of coy little moments that remain in the brain long after the record's over—Stockman's and Morris's lead vocals seem lost in all three Puffy-produced tracks, most notably in "Come On," where the melody isn't so much sung as searched for for five long minutes. As fabulous as the chart-topping entitles of BJM and Bad Boy Entertainment are separately, the superstar-producer matchup sadly doesn't really work this time.

Boyz II Men are the best we have at the moment, and are destined only to get better. It's evident in all the choices they make. The bills are already paid. It's creativity that builds greater interest over time. Boyz II Men can sing anything. But they shouldn't sing everything.

JAY-Z 'IN MY LIFETIME, VOL. 1' ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM



Easily one of Brooklyn's finest MCs—and once a shoo-in for the throne that the late, great Notorious B.I.G. once occupied—Jay-Z attempts to chase the two-faced mainstream dollar on his second album, *In My Lifetime, Vol. 1*. Instead of sticking with the formula that made his debut—last year's monumental *Reasonable Doubt*—score high with hip hop diaries, the man from the Marcy Projects dives headfirst into softcore.

The key word here is "inconsistency." In some songs, Jay-Z fires rhymes with fully automatic intensity; while on others, he throws punches with the impact of hip hop marshmallows. For instance, "The City Is Mine" sinks to lows one never imagined Jay would reach. Here, our hero goes for Puff fluff by using a popular '80s hit for a hook.

It's surefire enticement for radio, but between Teddy Riley's surprisingly subpar track and a snatch from Glenn Frey's 1985 hit, "You Belong to the City," Jay-Z's immense talent gets smothered in mediocrity.

Redemption comes when Ski gives "Streets Is Watching" the music runway that the Jiggs needs to fly right. Jay sets it on a new jack when he says, "If I shoot you, I'm brainless / But if you shoot me, you're famous / What's a nigga to do?" As in *Reasonable Doubt*'s fierce "Friend or Foe," Jay-Z charismatically bullies you with his verbal mastery.

And "Rap Game, Crack Game" again matches the slick production of Big Jaz ("Ain't no Niggas" with Jay's fluid, on-target, comparisons of the rap and drug worlds: "Hit a rapper with con-signment / Let him know what's at stake / Put his ass up in the studio / Let him cook up a cake.") Jay even shows some interstate thug love on "Real Niggas," which features a blistering guest spot by the always-icy Scarface. But "Lucky Me" brings it back to the ho-hum with its soulless R&B excursions.

Due to the current pop climate, *In My Lifetime, Vol. 1* will surely enjoy a healthy dose of mainstream consumption. But both plays and haters can be assured that Jay-Z's new, easy-to-swallow coating dulls the ruff'n' ready active ingredient that made his first release the classic cure.

The Blackspot

BRIAN MCKNIGHT 'ANYTIME' MERCURY



Considering the unfulfilling sample- and loop-heavy affair that's Brian McKnight's *Anytime*, it's clear that the singer has been erroneously dubbed the Donny Hathaway of his hop/R&B, even in the wake of his glowing, self-titled 1992 debut and 1996's satisfying *I Remember You*. When did skilled originality become meaningless in black pop?

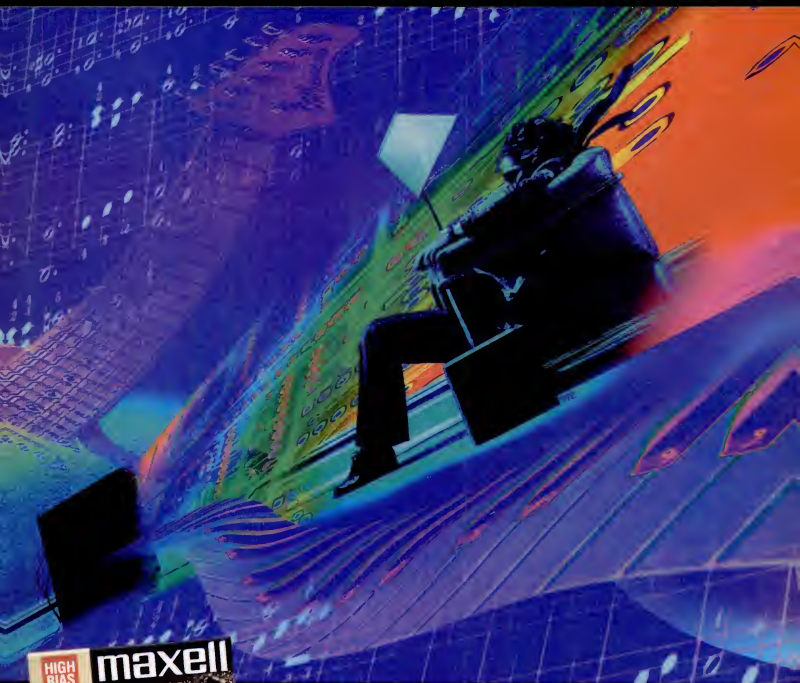
Cluttered with compose-by-numbers producers and songwriters—including Sean "Puffy" Combs, Track Masters, and Dianne Warren—*Anytime* is a collection of mostly tired joints such as "You Should Be Mine," "Hold Me," and "Could." Further tarnished by anemic couplets like "I'm down on my knees / Beggin' you please" and "Won't ever let you down / I'll always be around," McKnight's third solo effort pales in comparison to work by emerging neo-soul craftsmen like Eric Benét and Rahaan Patterson.

Darrell M. McNeill

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SEPTEMBER COCA-COLA "SOUL BOWL" RESULTS:

Foxy made it into the playoffs by winning the division with their jam "Get Off" which scored 11.2% of the listener's votes. However, the game was close with the *Sounds of Blackness* single "Hold On (Change Is Coming)" winning second place. S.M.E. came in next with their song "In The Middle". Zakiya followed closely with her jam "My Love Won't Fade Away". Last but definitely not least was Nuyorican Soul's jam "I Am The Black Gold Of The Sun".



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REVOLUTIONS
BY ROB KENNER

BOOM SHOTS

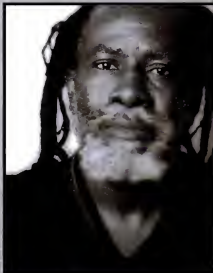
"My way is long," sang the man called the Burning Spear back in 1969, "and the road is foggy." At that point in history, young Winston Rodney had no way of knowing just how long or how foggy the road would be, but he's trodden it with sure footsteps for three decades now. At first, he had a tough time convincing Jamaica's top hitmaking producer, Coxsone Dodd, to even let him make a record. Spear's voice was much rawer than the smooth crooners (like Ken Boothe's and Slim Smith's) that Dodd's reputation was built upon. "Coxsone didn't think Spear could sing good at first," Spear recalls. "But when he feel the vibes of the first tune and saw the people reaction, he changed his mind." More than anyone else, it was Spear who first popularized the heavy chant style of roots-rock reggae, blazing a trail that's been followed by countless younger artists.

"I get started the roots and culture way," he says. "My first song for Studio One, back in 1969, was 'Chant Down Babylon.' So therefore I and I did have to chant it down." And then there was the name, borrowed from Jomo Kenyatta, the warrior statesman who helped liberate Kenya from British rule in 1963. "When I get started in the business," Spear adds, "there was no such name like Burning Spear. An elder matched me up with that name, and right away I could identify the perfectness within it. It's like a bell—when you say 'Burning Spear.' It's like a light—when you say 'Burning Spear.' It's like a cool breeze—when you say 'Burning Spear.' It's like the sunshine—when you say 'Burning Spear.' Behold the power of word, sound. Behold the Spear burning over yonder.

Burning Spear's undisputed masterpiece, 1975's *Marcus Garvey*, cannot be adequately praised on sonic or spiritual grounds. Working with a stellar lineup of musicians hired by first-time producer Jack Ruby, Spear lobbed missiles like "Slavery Days" and "Old Marcus Garvey"—harsh wake-up calls for the ignorant or the complacent. His fiery rhetoric was not warmly received at first. Then again, most great art is overlooked the first go-round. "When I draw for those tunes, people couldn't deal with it," he recalls. "What I was saying was far away from their mind and thought. But I was thinkin', *Yes, these are the songs people need to hear.*"

Spear has trodden the Earth for more than half a century now, delivering sensible songs about family and love, dignity and discipline, releasing countless albums, and rocking venues large and small. The latest recording, *Appointment With His Majesty*, is his 14th for Heartbeat Records. The sound has matured, perhaps even mellowed a bit, and there's even a funny song called "Play Jerry," which will please Grateful Dead fans. But in selections like "Don't Sell Out" and "The Future (Clean It Up)," Spear's still chanting down Babylon without apology.

Though his beard is white and his dreads are getting long, Spear is ready to tour once more. When he visits your town—and he will—expect to see lines around the block, people of many ages, shapes, and shades. They are drawn by a mystic vibration, a force as old as Earth itself, a gravity they can't find anyplace else.



A close-up, vertical shot of a condensation-covered 20 oz. Coca-Cola Classic plastic bottle. The bottle is covered in water droplets, and the label is clearly visible, showing the 'Coca-Cola' script and 'CLASSIC' in block letters. The bottle is positioned on the right side of the page.



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COURTNEY PINE 'UNDERGROUND'

VERVE/ANTIILLES

Modern-day jazz guys tend to follow the music path of either Wynton or Branford Marsalis—they adopt the traditionalist route of '50s jazz or attempt to push the envelope with neo-hip-hop excursions. British saxophonist Courtney Pine travels in the latter direction on his eighth effort, *Underground*.

featuring turntable techniques from DJ Pogo alongside esteemed contemporary jazz men like trumpeter Nicholas Payton.

Underground balances avant-garde elements (drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts's trip hop beats on "Outro-Xhale") with the mo' better blues-isms of vocalist Jhelissa (covering Donny Hathaway's "Tryin' Times") to billowy effect. Whether doing straight-ahead jazz or exploring more postmodern avenues, Courtney Pine conducts matters with the stroke of a veritable jazz master. He doesn't just blow; he is the wind.

Miles Marshall Lewis

REVOLUTIONS
BEATIFICATIONS

EPMD 'BACK IN BUSINESS'

DEF JAM

On *Strictly Business*, EPMD's seminal 1988 debut, Erick Sermon and Parrish Smith sounded like two MCs in love with themselves, each other, and rhyming. They set back-and-forth, one-voice-slurred/one-voice-crisp vocals over primordial funk concoctions. Sermon and Smith validated each other's existence—and seemed to enjoy it.

EPMD's Zapp-dipped, bouncy tracks overshadowed the fact that their lyrical schemes—mostly stuff about cashing checks and snapping necks and rhyming their names six millions ways—were simplistic at best. After an ugly parting of ways and then mediocre solo careers, the duo apparently realized that Johnnie Taylor spoke gospel in '73 when he said, "It's cheaper to keep her."

Back in Business, the twosome's highly anticipated reunion album, should be irresistible to nostalgic hip hoppers past the double-decade mark. There are "Jane Pt. 5," "You Got's 2 Chill '97," and the Average White Band/Kool & the Gang-powered "Richter Scale"—all of which sound like ain't a damned thing changed with EPMD.

But things have changed for them, both in life and on wax. What's nowhere to be found on *Back in Business* is a posse-track reunion of Parrish's Hit Squad (featuring Das EFX) and Erick's Def Squad (featuring Redman and Keith Murray). Instead, there's Das outshining both Erick and Parrish on "Intigrued." And there's "K.L.M." in which Red and Murray attack the mike like ravenous rotweilers while EPMD sort of just stand there.

Back in Business is not EPMD at their best. Cuts like "Da Joint," "Do It Again," "Get With This," and "Last Man Standing" are completely uninspired; Sermon's sluggish production makes the duo's paper-thin and finance-driven subject matter that much more irritating. But EPMD have always been about Erick and Parrish Making Dollars, and *Back in Business* should get the checks flowing again.

christian ex



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CASSANDRA WILSON AND JACKY TERRASSON 'RENDEZVOUS' BLUE NOTE

arrangements—a Wilson trademark. But this mood would seem to go against type for Terrasson, who seemed to favor style over substance in his eponymous 1995 debut and its follow-up, 1996's *Reach*. Yet, Terrasson's improvisations on *Rendezvous* are complex and seamless. His featured instrumentals (an abstract reading of "Autumn Leaves," a soul-drenched "Chan's Song") are standouts. He continually impresses with fresh melodic turns and offbeat rhythmic shifts.

Terrasson also accompanies Wilson gracefully. The two mesh warmly on several surprising interpretations, such as the meditative "Tea for Two" and the sunny "Tennessee Waltz." There's also a whimsical take on "I Remember You" that begins with an angular, inquisitive piano solo followed by Wilson's breezing through the lyrics once—then nonchalantly ends. Although this offhand approach works, *Rendezvous* is not perfect. Wilson's connection to these standards seems tenuous. *Rendezvous* is technically a collaboration, but this disc is an affair far more Jacky Terrasson's than Cassandra Wilson's.

Suzanne McElfresh

With her last two albums, 1993's *Blue Light 'til Dawn* and last year's *New Moon Daughter*, jazz vocalist Cassandra Wilson distinguished herself as a vibrant interpreter of the pop songs of her generation. She personalized Neil Young, Hank Williams, and Van Morrison while redefining fare like the Monkees' 1966 "Last Train to Clarksville." Wilson not only claimed these songs as modern standards, she renewed the viability of jazz singing in these entirely unsentimental times.

On *Rendezvous*, which pairs the chanteuse with French pianist Jacky Terrasson, Wilson's picks—"Autumn Leaves," "Tea for Two," "My Ship," "It Might As Well Be Spring"—are more conventional. But within the opening track ("Old Devil Moon") there lies a slinky bass, some pulsing congas, and a sly tambourine—hints that the familiar songs will sound anything but typical in the hands of Wilson, Terrasson, bassist Lonnie Plaxico, and percussionist Mino Cinelu.

Part of the band's magic comes from spare, refined arrangements but typical in the hands of Wilson, Terrasson, bassist Lonnie Plaxico, and percussionist Mino Cinelu.

GRAVEDIGGAZ 'THE PICK, THE SICKLE AND THE SHOVEL' OCE STREET



Fresh from a triple-platinum double album with his *other* group, the RZA, hip hop's own gold-fanged Nosferatu incarnate, keeps the precious metal shining on *The Pick, the Sickle and the Shovel*. This second offering from Gravediggaz—a stoned soul side project featuring Frukwan, Poetic, and Prince Paul—finds the Wu-Tang boardman moving away from production and immersing himself fully in the power of words.

Standouts like "Twelve Jewels" remind us that RZA is a master MC. "Caught up in the mist of six," he says, voice heavier than lead, "You better grab a hold of your crucifix / And this is it / The black god exists / But can you understand this / Let me teach you a lesson." The Rzaractor's righteous rhyming makes for a very Good Evening.

David By

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BY GREGG TATE

THE REAL MUSIC

"I think the jazz era is over," says Graham Haynes. "The only people who are really playing jazz today are some of the old cats who were around back in the day." Coming from the cornetist son of jazz legend Roy Haynes, these words are more provocative. In fact, they verge on the apocalyptic. But even the presence of Haynes's horn won't stifle the debates that'll be sparked by his new album, *Tones for the 21st Century*.

Recorded in his Brooklyn apartment with a battery of samplers, sequencers, and processors, the very ambient *Tones* strives for trance-inducing effects far removed from anybody's notion of swing. There are some tracks where Haynes's flügelhorn and cornet are processed to such an extreme that you'd be hard-pressed to identify the brass hidden behind the clouds of sonic wallpaper.

Raised, like Reverend Run, in Hollis, Queens, Haynes first came to prominence as a member of M-Base ombudsman Steve Coleman's band, Five Elements. Through his workings with Coleman, Haynes developed a taste for rhythmic complexity that led him to relocate to Paris in search of modern African musicians. The fruits of that overseas experiment are evident on his last release, *Transition*, and its predecessor, *Griots Footsteps*.

Tones represents a boldly going, tripped-out quantum leap. Except for Haynes, there are no other soloists. The album's 50-plus minutes glide along like one long composition, recycling moods rather than melodies. But Haynes's electronica doesn't come by way of wannabe hipness—which is often the case in jazz. *Tones* communicates complete aural immersion; it's kind of like drowning, only less fatal. Some will find *Tones* so soothing that it puts them to sleep or provokes a click of the remote to the next disc. Others will get a charge out of someone like Haynes—with his jazz pedigree—having the *cojones* to jump ship in such a reckless way.

Jazz at this point is as much a branch of modern philosophy as a form of music. For musicians like Haynes who believe in boldly going where no New Orleans parade trumpeter has ever gone before, why one plays is as critical as playing what one plays. "There's a lot of stuff I like, but when I sit down to create, I can't even think about it, or think about rules either. I think, as an artist, once you start saying there's stuff you won't do—like play electric instruments or use loops or whatever—then it's over. You might as well not be an artist anymore."

Kenny Garrett is one young musician who does keep the flame of jazz alive. And *Songbook*, Garrett's new album, ranks as his most inventive and explosively realized project yet. Much respect goes to his band: bassist Nat Reeves, drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts, and pianist Kenny Kirkland.

Watts and Kirkland are well known for their work with both Marsalis brothers and were instrumental in Branford's superlative *Crazy People Music*. The duo bring a higher order of bite and locomotion to Garrett's music. This is a group in which each member of the rhythm section pushes, rips, snarls, and massages his partners toward catharsis and extreme lyricism. Garrett responds fluently, doling out equal doses of ferociousness, romance, and brain matter. *Bravissimo*, blood.

Graham Haynes



VARIOUS ARTISTS THE PHILLY SOUND: KENNY GAMBLE, LEON HUFF & THE STORY OF BROTHERLY LOVE' EPIC/LEGACY

For almost 30 years, the songs of Jerry Butler, Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, Billy Paul, the Three Degrees, MFSB, and the O'Jays defined a movement that few modern music legacies could rival. It was the Sound of Philadelphia, an assemblage of aural masterpieces divinely rendered by visionary producer/songwriters Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff.

The Philadelphia sound melded grit with sophistication, social criticism with

dance-floor perspiration. It stands as perhaps the most spiritually inspirational body of "secular" music known to humankind.

Despite the fact that there are enough omissions (like Jerry Butler's 1968 "Never Give You Up" and Wilson Pickett's 1970 "Engine Number 9") in *The Philly Sound's* three-disc set to fill another CD, this compilation is a wonderful soul chronicle.

Disc One features the early years of the Philly phenomenon. Gamble and Huff's strategy of

marrying sensuous, Motown-esque string arrangements to urgent, evocative vocals bore perfect, three-minute pop songs. The Intruders' 1968 "Cowboys to Girls," Jerry Butler's 1969 "Only the Strong Survive," and Wilson Pickett's 1970 "Don't Let the Green Grass Fool You" are brassy numbers that swing like a wide-turning Caddy. Billy Paul's elegant 1972 "Me & Mrs. Jones" and Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes' haunting 1972 "If You Don't Know Me By Now" are among the showstoppers that set the standard for today's ballads.

With the O'Jays' epochal 1972 "Back Stabbers," Gamble and Huff began to raise the stakes conceptually, addressing subjects such as world peace (the O'Jays' 1972 "Love Train"), familial bonds (the Intruders' 1973 "I'll Always Love My Mama"), racial discourse (Billy Paul's 1972 "Am I Black Enough for You"), and self-awareness (Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes' 1975 "Wake Up Everybody"). The bulk of Discs Two and Three document this mental/music revolution.

The rhythmic charge of the Philly International house band (spearheaded by its unsung hero, drummer Earl Young) is what propelled Gamble and Huff's increasingly topical compositions into a soulful state of euphoria that would later be labeled disco. The inclusion of MFSB's 1974 "Love Is the Message," the Jacksons' 1976 "Enjoy Yourself," and the Trammps' 1975 "Love Epidemic" helps decry the genre's robotic connotations.

After one concentrated listen, it's clear that *The Philly Sound* collection is the ultimate testament to the genius of Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. It's edutainment of the highest order.

Chairman Mao



The Philly Sound

KENNY GAMBLE, LEON HUFF & THE STORY
OF BROTHERLY LOVE (1966-1973)

PORTISHEAD

PORTISHEAD

IN STORES 9.30.97

EPIC LEGACY

PETER TOSH 'HONORARY CITIZEN' SONY LEGACY

"Don't think I come here for entertainment," intoned Peter Tosh during a 1982 gig in the city he called Hell-A. "I an' I come to flash lightning, earthquake, and thunder in these places of destruction and unrighteousness." Before launching into "Glasshouse," the Bush Doctor went on to prophesy pestilence



in the City of Angels, defying the audience—which kept cheering away haplessly—to “calculate your judgment.” This five-minute, mid-concert malediction is but one of the transcendent moments gathered on the crucial, new Tosh boxed set, *Honorary Citizen*.

The first disc alone, *Rare Uncollected Jamaican Singles*, is a treasure for even the most faithful Tosh fan. Here is one of the first releases on the Wailers' own *Wall*

'M Soul 'N' label, a 1967 economics lesson called “Pound Get a Blow.” Here is “Rightful Ruler,” featuring future legends Tosh and U-Roy chanting praises to Jah over the dreadest of Scratch Perry rhythms. Here is “Lion,” a skeptical update on a Marley anthem (“You’re talking ‘bout Iron, Lion,” sings Tosh, “but you can’t go to Zion”). And so it goes, from a warm-and-easy Beatles cover to a dub version of “Legalize It” to “Mark of the Beast,” a song inspired by a brutal police beating Tosh experienced after a particularly scathing onstage critique of the political “shit-stem.”

There are more gems on the other two discs, notably an intimate “unplugged” version of “Get Up, Stand Up” that showcases Tosh’s formidable guitar skills. Keith Richards and Mick Jagger turn up, as do some of the roughest grooves Sly & Robbie ever forged. Then there’s a straight-up hymn accompanied by choir, surf, and seagulls. Throughout all the wildly diverse selections, two constants emerge: Tosh’s genius for vocal phrasing and his take-no-prisoners commitment to overturning “downpression.” (It certainly isn’t “up”-pression.) “My songs are not smiling songs,” he states in one succinct sound bite. “My songs are a threat to society.”

A truly exhaustive Tosh collection would have to include *The Toughest*, Heartbeat’s anthology of his earliest Studio One and Upsetter titles. But as a damn-near definitive collection of the Stepping Razor’s sharpest cuts, *Honorary Citizen* is a long-overdue testament to the neglected legacy of a misunderstood man—a former Wailer, whose life was cut short by an assassin’s bullets 10 years ago, who could claim without exaggeration that “Bob Marley was my student.”

Rob Kenner



an Utley and Geoff Barrow snap out the beats.

Throughout “Humming,” a *Lost In Space* theremin keeps it there. “All Mine” is soul controlling with horn blows and stalking snarls. In “Half Day Closing,” Gibbons drowns in her own warbling caterwaul. She laments “I can’t recognize me anymore” on the aching “Ovrr.” After “Elysium” breaks down into a grieving piano/guitar dirge, Gibbons lashes out, shrill and trembling. Ahh, love is a many-splintered cling.

Dave Tompkins

VARIOUS ARTISTS 'BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB' NONESUCH/WORLD CIRCUI

Buena Vista Social Club is a guitar-based, all-star acoustic tryst that teams American guitarist Ry Cooder with legendary Cuban vocalists Eliades Ochoa, Omara Portuondo, Compay Segundo, and Ibrahim Ferrer. The beguiling fusion of Cooder’s rangy slide guitar with the *danzon* and other, conga-tinged Afro-Hispanic rhythms (supplied by the renowned Sierra Maestra percussionists) makes for an exciting multicultural marriage. Bassist Orlando “Cachaíto” López, son of mambo cocreator Orestes López, adds gusto to the group’s union.

Ranging from the 1869 poetic classic “La Bayamesa” and the prancing “Candela” to the unforgettable title track, which features pianist Rubén González’s jumpy solo, *Buena Vista Social Club* is an engaging, swinging set.

Ernest Holley Jr.

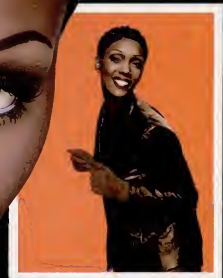
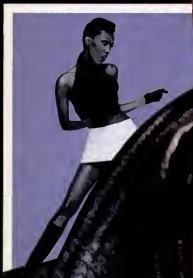
AARON NEVILLE 'TO MAKE ME WHO I AM' A&M RECORDS



On Aaron Neville’s new, divine *To Make Me Who I Am*, the falsetto angel uses the rich songwriting and production talents of craftsmen such as Kenneth “Babyface” Edmonds and Tony Rich. It’s a marriage made in pop-soul heaven. The Babyface-penned “Say What’s in My Heart” is a fine setting for

Neville’s soaring, romantic vows, while the Rich-produced “What Did I Do to Deserve You?” professes undying faith. In the standout “God Made You for Me,” Neville achingly warbles, “It must have taken a long time / To make a woman like you.” He stammers to sound both lustful and damn grateful. No doubt, *To Make Me Who I Am* is rising make-out music for folks in an old-fashioned frame of mind.

Neill Bogan



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1. Doesn't that *E.coli* scare give new meaning to the Notorious B.I.G.'s recent "What's Beef?"

2. Speaking of Big Poppa, with two posthumous No. 1 pop singles, is Brooklyn's baddest straying eerily close to Otis Redding territory? 3. Why is 1982's *Wild Style*

still the best, most illmatic, crazy fresh, hip hop flick ever made? 4. We love him, but isn't



10. Brand Nubian, EPMD, Nice & Smooth, Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth all reunited—how come we can't sleep until we see the triumphant

return of 3rd Bass? 11. Aren't Billy Porter and Malcolm-Jamal Warner the same

person? 12. Why do we love Chris Rock's "Champagne" video? 13. Is

that UPN show *Strange Universe* strange, or what? 14. Is Missy Elliot trying to dis a certain diva on that song "Not

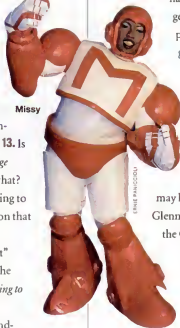
Tonight" from the *Nothing to Lose* soundtrack? (Check the abstract Patti LaBelle reference for yourselves.) 15. Regarding En Vogue's "Whatever" remix, we understand they might be trying to make up for the loss of Dawn Robinson,

but isn't Ol' Dirty Bastard a little deficient in the cleavage department? 16. Is there a bohemian poets handbook that requires them to speak in the same cadence and use the same

hand gestures? 17. Why do people use the phrase convergence technology when you can just say "computer in a TV"?

18. And, why are technotronic rude-boy posse Prodigy turning ravers into protégés? 19. Jay-Z may have his own version of Glenn Frey's "You Belong to the City" (from the Miami Vice soundtrack), but does a song with a hook like that belong on *anyone's* album in

1997? 20. And, finally, regarding the "68"-type songs ("69-and-I-owe-you-one") from Lil' Kim, Akinyele, Lady Saw, and Tanya Stephens, we're wondering, does anybody out there *enjoy* giving oral sex?



20 QUESTIONS

Chico DeBarge D'Angelo with body?

5. Is there a more underrated artist in the world of dancehall than Degree?

6. Somebody—anybody—please tell us: Why are Gang Starr still so dope? 7. Is it because when they do a live show, Premier

still scratches like a frat boy with crabs? 8. How long will we have to wait for the return of hip house? 9. Why do people tattoo their own names onto themselves?



DeBarge

Lil' Kim

DEE DEE BRIDGEWATER 'DEAR ELLA' VERVE

Until her death in 1996, Ella Fitzgerald was the absolute First Lady of Song. Ella's uncanny sense of swing and impeccable articulation enabled her to express her essence in every lyric she uttered. Dee Dee Bridgewater is not the new Ella; but with Bridgewater's skills, all she has to do is be her own bad self.

Bridgewater is no newcomer to the jazz game, having recorded and played with the likes of Roy Ayers and Norman Connors. Her vocals are responsible for one certified classic LP—1978's *Just Family*, featuring appearances by Stanley Clarke on bass and Chick Corea on keys. And back in 1975, she dazzled Broadway in *The Wiz* as the show-stopping Glinda the Good Witch. Now, Bridgewater is back with *Dear Ella*. On it, Bridgewater pays respect to the life and songs of Fitzgerald. And give thanks: Ella successfully captures the spirit of a tremendous treasure lost.

To do Fitzgerald justice is a daunting challenge. With this in mind, Bridgewater comes fully equipped: She activates her signature multioctave contralto alongside a cross-generational crew of rhythm rockers, including bass hero Ray Brown, vibist Milt Jackson, altoist Antonio Hart, and trumpeter Cecil Bridgewater (the singer's former husband). It's an infectious groove combination guaranteed to kill even the strong softly.

Although some of the songs are dinner/theater filler ("A-Tisket, A-Tasket," "Mack the Knife," and "Stairway to the Stars"), Bridgewater reanimates Ella standards like "How High the Moon" and "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," giving these immortal numbers a new vitality. And with songs like "Undecided," "Mr. Paganini," "Midnight Sun," and "Oh, Lady Be Good," Bridgewater illustrates the warm, sacred, nighttime Ella that we dream about. No doubt Angel Ella is scattering her approval from on high.

Tom Terrell



Photo Credit: [illegible]



ANT BANKS REVOLUTIONS BEAOTATIONS TOP 10

SIGN: Taurus

ROOTS: Oakland, California

CURRENT SOUNDTRACK:

1. ERIC B. & RAKIM—*Paid in Full*
2. N.W.A.—*Straight Outta Compton*
3. DR. DRE—*The Chronic*
4. TOO SHORT—*Life Is... Too Short*
5. 2PAC—*All Eyes on Me*
6. SCARFACE—*The Diary*
7. OUTKAST—*Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik*
8. WC AND THE MAAD CIRCLE—*Ain't a Damn Thing Changed*
9. ICE CUBE—*Amerikkka's Most Wanted*
10. E-40—*In a Major Way*

ALBUM HE PLAYS WHEN IT'S TIME TO GET BUSY: Prince—*The Hits/The B-Sides*

THE LAST MOVIE HE RENTED: *The Mack*

SONG THAT USED TO ROCK HIS HIGH SCHOOL DANCES: "Bounce, Skate, Roll, Rock"—Vaughan Mason & Crew

FIRST LIVE SHOW HE SAW: Parliament: Mothership Connection at the Oakland Coliseum, 1978



Photo Credit: [illegible]

AT BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE

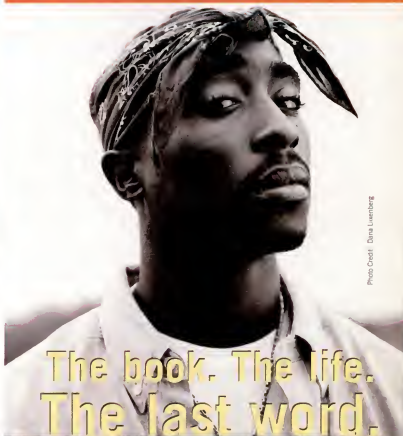


Photo Credit: [illegible]

The book. The life. The last word.

Compiled by the editors of *VIBE*, this is the definitive biography of this generation's most controversial hip-hop artist, from his childhood as the son of a former Black Panther and his explosive arrival on the hip-hop scene, to his highly publicized rivalries and arrests and his violent death at age 25.

TUPAC SHAKUR includes more than 125 full-color, exclusive photographs from *VIBE*'s archives, a foreword by Quincy Jones, an introduction by Danyel Smith, and a wealth of never-before-published material, including memorial tributes from John Singleton and Ernest Dickerson and the text from a complete on-line interview with Tupac.

TUPAC SHAKUR An Illustrated Biography

By the Editors of *VIBE* Magazine
Foreword by Quincy Jones

May Tupac Shakur rest in peace, and may the rest of us live in it.

Photo Credit: [illegible]



THE DETAILS

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VIBEScity: City Slickers, page 114

New York PLATON V-neck T-shirt \$5 by What Comes Around Goes Around available at What Comes Around Goes Around, N.Y.C.; white cotton ribbed short \$5 by B. Calvin Klein jeans available at select Macy's and Bloomingdale's nationwide; any wool blue zip cardigan \$5 by Ego available at Macy's East and West and select Dillard's nationwide; sea green cotton Michael Jackson T-shirt \$5 by What Comes Around Goes Around available at What Comes Around Goes Around, N.Y.C.

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Newy suede cowboy shirt \$50 by Polo Jeans Co. available at select Bloomingdale's and Macy's nationwide; denim jeans with white stitching \$45 by Ego available at Macy's East and select Ron Herman and Fred Segal nationwide; brown suede tie jacket \$5 by What Comes Around Goes Around available at What Comes Around Goes Around, N.Y.C.; denim short \$5 by Ego available at Macy's East, N.Y.C.; beige polyester button-down shirt with brown stitching \$45 by Reactor available at Antique Boutique, N.Y.C. and Transit, N.Y.C.; tape cord pants \$44 by Unosway available at Canal Jeans, N.Y.C.

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White tank short \$5 by Calvin Klein Underwear available at select Macy's and Bloomingdale's nationwide; gray cotton zip-front hoodie \$88 by Todd Oldham jeans available at Todd Oldham Boutique, Miami, LA, N.Y.C.; black kangaroo foot by OMD Norma Kamali (see more information, call 800-8-KAMALI); denim cowboy shirt \$50 and denim button shirt \$50 by Todd Oldham jeans available at Rag Factory, L.A., and select Neiman Marcus nationwide; olive Ultralite denim \$79, both by \$26 available at select Urban Outfitters and Nordstrom nationwide; black wool turtleneck \$44 by Polo Jeans Co. available at select Macy's and Bloomingdale's nationwide; black polyester warm-up pants with white stripes \$45 by And (for more information, call 800-796-8900).

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Brown suede sweater \$50 by Polo Jeans Co. available at select Macy's, and Bloomingdale's nationwide; sea green vintage Levi's corduroy jacket \$55 by What Comes Around Goes Around available at What Comes Around Goes Around, N.Y.C.; blue mesh nylon Dallas Cowboys jersey \$44 by Starter (for more information, call 800-776-5450).

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Denim jacket by Levi's (for more information, call 800-USA-LEVI); black floral lace stretch nylon tank \$18 by Calvin Klein Underwear available at select Macy's and Bloomingdale's nationwide.

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Red polo-cotton hooded zip-front jacket \$57 by Dickies (for more information, call 800-DICKIES); blue denim cotton button shirt \$20 by Winger available at Antique Boutique, N.Y.C.; sky blue cotton P.A. man T-shirt \$5 by What Comes Around Goes Around available at What Comes Around Goes Around, N.Y.C.; tape cord cargo pants \$50 by Ego available at select Foodland and Dr. Jay's N.Y.C.; navy wool knit zip cardigan \$45 by Ego available at Macy's East and West, and select Dillard's nationwide; denim button-front shirt \$50 by Mecca available at Ron Herman/Fred Segal, L.A., and Trends, Atlanta; tan suede coat \$20 by GUESS? Leather (for more information, call 800-39-GUESS); gray hooded fleece top \$57 by Twinn available at Dr. Jay's and select Cavalier stores nationwide; black and white herringbone wool-cotton pants \$54 by Ego available at select Macy's and Ron Herman/Fred Segal, L.A.; black cotton PLATON T-shirt \$5 by What Comes Around Goes Around available at What Comes Around Goes Around, N.Y.C.; blue denim jeans \$44 by Reactor available at Antique Boutique and Transit, N.Y.C.

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Black patchwork leather jacket \$85 by What Comes Around Goes Around available at What Comes Around Goes Around, N.Y.C.; gray long sleeve cotton-cord shirt \$5 by Mecca available at Dr. Jay's, N.Y.C., and Trends, Atlanta; black mesh polyester turtleneck pants \$45 by And (for more information, call 800-796-8900).

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VIBEFashion: Night & Day, page 116

Prada/Miu Miu: Gray stretch wool pants \$50 and lavender cotton organza tunic, \$20, both by Miu Miu available at Miu Miu, SoHo and select Barney's New York nationwide; black leather jacket \$5, black cashmere turtleneck \$50, and black wool \$50, all by Prada available at Prada, N.Y.C. and Fairfield, LA.

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Venus by Versace: Navy cotton mockneck sweater \$20, navy wool wrap miniskirt \$30, all by Versace by Versace available at Versace Boutique's nationwide.

page 120

John Bartlett: Charcoal painted wool chestnut jacket \$25, charcoal asymmetrical wool rib mockneck sweater \$30, and charcoal plaid wool pants with side buckle \$30, all by John Bartlett available at Traffic, LA, and Camouflage, N.Y.C.

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Helmut Lang: Women's black wool blazer \$135, black wool pants with beige band \$62, men's black wool turtleneck \$17, women's cotton button-down shirt \$20, all by Helmut Lang available at Barney's New York and select Neiman Marcus nationwide.

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Gucci: Brown wool mohair pants \$40, black wool turtleneck pants \$40, all by Guccio available at select Guccio nationwide.

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Couture National Homme: Black polyester mockneck top \$45, black plaid polyester-acrylic flared pants \$55, black and silver color V-neck top \$45, black wool flared pants \$95, all by Couture Homme available at Barney's New York, N.Y., and Beverly Hills, and Ron Herman/Fred Segal, L.A.; black polyamide miniskirt \$35 by Couture National available at Acacia, Beverly Hills.

The Stylist: Stone Island, page 128

Gray cotton flared pant \$50, gray Microlight goose-down jacket \$200, black nylon ski mittens \$40, black Pyle wool-suede leather sweater \$30, black ripa mockneck cardigan \$35, all available at Ron Herman/Fred Segal, LA, and Jekyll and Hyde, N.Y.C.

If you would like any information about the designers listed above or about a retailer near you, please send a letter or postcard stating which designer(s) and include the following information to: **yourself**, name, address, age, and sex. Also, please indicate how much you plan to spend on apparel in the next six months: \$0-\$500, \$500-\$1,000, \$1,000-\$1,500, \$1,500-\$2,000, \$2,000-\$2,500, \$2,500-\$3,000, \$3,000-\$3,500, \$3,500-\$4,000, \$4,000-\$4,500, \$4,500-\$5,000, \$5,000-\$5,500, \$5,500-\$6,000, \$6,000-\$6,500, \$6,500-\$7,000, \$7,000-\$7,500, \$7,500-\$8,000, \$8,000-\$8,500, \$8,500-\$9,000, \$9,000-\$9,500, \$9,500-\$10,000, \$10,000-\$10,500, \$10,500-\$11,000, \$11,000-\$11,500, \$11,500-\$12,000, \$12,000-\$12,500, \$12,500-\$13,000, \$13,000-\$13,500, \$13,500-\$14,000, \$14,000-\$14,500, \$14,500-\$15,000, \$15,000-\$15,500, \$15,500-\$16,000, \$16,000-\$16,500, \$16,500-\$17,000, \$17,000-\$17,500, \$17,500-\$18,000, \$18,000-\$18,500, \$18,500-\$19,000, \$19,000-\$19,500, \$19,500-\$20,000, \$20,000-\$20,500, \$20,500-\$21,000, \$21,000-\$21,500, \$21,500-\$22,000, \$22,000-\$22,500, \$22,500-\$23,000, \$23,000-\$23,500, \$23,500-\$24,000, \$24,000-\$24,500, \$24,500-\$25,000, 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Some of my most memorable evenings in the 1950s were spent watching Thelonious Monk play in clubs in New York's East Village, like the Five Spot Café and the Jazz Gallery. When the music was really happening, Monk would get up from the piano to dance. One night at the Gallery, he left the stand, moved down the aisle, and went to the back of the room. Elbows akimbo, stabbing the air, he executed his signature stutter steps and muttered aphoristic, enigmatic asides: "Two is one," Monk said. "Black is white."

After he died, from a stroke in 1982, Monk's great friend and patron Baroness

Nica de Koenigswarter asked me to deliver the eulogy at his funeral. She sent me a passage from Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. It was about the music of Ludwig van Beethoven; but wherever the classical composer's name appeared, she had substituted Monk's. I incorporated the excerpt into my speech, and shortly after the ceremony, members of Monk's family contacted the Washington D.C.-based Beethoven Society of America to find a way to honor Thelonious's memory.

In the liner notes to Blue Note's 1976 collection *The Complete Genius*, I wrote

that if Thelonious Monk had had a dollar for each time his name was misspelled, he could have endowed his own professorial chair at some university. But it wasn't until 1986, after his son, the drummer T.S., had entered the memorial discussions, that the idea for the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz became a reality. With T.S. at its helm, the Washington, D.C. school now sponsors a world-renowned annual talent competition.

Mysterious and magical on and off the piano stand, Monk left a legacy that continues to influence and inspire: indestructible melodies and unique rhythmic constructions played with the same off-beat sense of hesitation that made for those startling stutter steps. From "Round Midnight" to "Four in One," his tunes remain a vital source for today's musicians. And as we approach what would have been his 80th birthday (October 10), a whole new pair of aphorisms comes to mind: Monk is one. Monk was right.

Ira Gitler



If we can still close the suitcase, we're not done packing.

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